Papers on the Holy Spirit

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Receive ye the Holy Ghost

John 20:22

It was the first day of the week, and the same day at even our Lord finds Himself in the midst of His people gathered together. The first word He utters is peace — “Peace be unto you.” Precious word! It was not remission of sins simply, blessed as this may be, but “Peace be unto you.” Peace is much more than sins forgiven; and “when He had so said, He showed unto them His hands and His side.” He showed them what was the sign and witness of the shed blood of His cross, by which He had made peace. “Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.” But speaking to them again He repeats the words, “Peace be unto you.” Only this second time, remark, it is not now so much personal as prefatory to their mission; for He adds, “As My Father sent Me, even so send I you.” Thus the first words of peace would be for their own enjoyment, as I conceive; the second declaration comes as the introduction to their mission. It is this with which they are sent to others. It is therefore repeated to them, that in the renewed strength of this peace they may go forth. As the Father sent Him so the Son sends them, for He always speaks as the conscious Son of God in communion with the Father.

But there is a notable sign appended: “When He had said this, He breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” Probably many who read these lines are not ignorant of the correspondence that has been carried on but recently on this very passage.

There are two contradicting theories which claim to be received: one, that our Lord here establishes a kind of sacerdotal authority, by virtue of which those whom He addressed and their successors were entitled, in His own name, to give remission of sins to everyone who confessed his sins duly. I wish to put the view as fairly as possible. They all admit, of course, that there may be a failure in the conditions, whence, after all, the remission comes to nothing, notwithstanding where there is uprightness on man's part; they hold that the Lord pledges His part through His servants; that is to say, His absolution pronounced by virtue of this commission through certain authorised channels to the end of time. "No," says the opposite party, "nothing of the sort. There is miraculous action here supposed. If men nowadays profess to absolve people from their sins, why not cleanse lepers and raise the dead? Why not perform the other miracles which the Lord empowered the disciples to work?" Now does it not seem amazing that Christian men should broach theories so miserably short of the truth of God as both of these? The one seems to be just as unsatisfactory as the other. Even the latter view, which emanates from the evangelical party, really concedes what is worst in the former, while it falls into absurdity, as well as evasion of the truth, by bringing the performance of miracles into a passage which alludes to nothing of the sort. For it is clear that the argument just spoken of assumes that if men could cleanse lepers and raise the dead they are competent to absolve sins. But we deny that it ever was the title of disciples to grant such absolution as is contended for. Thus, whether we take the ritualistic or the evangelical theory, it is hard to say which is farthest from Scripture.

Is it then insinuated that the passage has no determinate meaning? Far be such a thought. What gives a clue to the subject is the Lord's resurrection as here presented. If men better knew Christ and the power of His resurrection they would understand that which is a fruit of it. Hence ignorance of resurrection privileges leaves men, whether on one or other side of the quarrel, in the dark as to the truth which is here revealed. For let it be observed that after our Lord sends the disciples out with peace He breathed on them. I am not aware of any action in the Bible to which this can be supposed to refer but one, and with this it stands in marked and instructive contradistinction. If we examine Genesis 2 a very striking difference on Jehovah Elohim's part appears in forming man as compared with any other animal. When He made the various beasts, birds, reptiles, etc., each became, as it is said, "a living soul" by the simple fact that it had been duly organised. In man's case it was not so. Man was made out of the dust of the earth, as we know; but he did not become a living soul by being thus fashioned. There comes out an essential difference between man and every other such being then created.

It is not merely that all the rest of the animal kingdom were put under man here below, but he alone had his life direct from above. "Jehovah Elohim breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." No other animal became a living soul thus. Man, and man alone, enjoyed the breath of Jehovah Elohim. Such is the true source of the immortality of the soul; this is the reason why man alone stands in direct moral responsibility to God, and must give account of the things done in the body to that God who thus gave him

his soul and spirit. In the case of a beast, though possessed of a spirit, it goes downward and not to God, because God never breathed into it. The living principle of a beast, in other words, perishes, because it is a mere question of what is connected by God's will with its material organisation. Therefore an irrational animal when it dies perishes, but in man's case there is a soul and a spirit which abide distinct in origin from the body, having a far more intimate connection with God Himself. Accordingly therefore, the soul partakes of an immortality which the mere body, alive here below in its own nature, does not possess. This was a physical question of the will of God, but that was a thing which indelibly and intrinsically belonged to the soul and spirit. Therefore it is that the body of man will be raised up in the resurrection to be reunited to that soul and spirit, and so every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Here the risen Lord Jesus stands before us, and in this Gospel alone characteristically unites these two aspects. He is man, and now He is the risen man; but He is also the Lord God, even as Thomas immediately after says, "My Lord and my God." He is One who, in His own person, united both divine nature and proper manhood. He stands, the risen man, "the second man," on the first day of the week, and as the quickening or life-giving Spirit He breathes into the disciples. That is, it is the Spirit of Christ Jesus risen from the dead. It is the Holy Ghost accompanying this resurrection-life, and the power of it which the Lord, as the Head of the new family, conferred upon the members of that family. They had believed on Him and had life eternal. Now they had life abundantly. (John 10:10)

Accordingly such is the all-important change which came in with the action of our Lord Jesus Christ. One can conceive a person reasoning on this subject and saying, “If people get eternal life, I do not see what great difference it makes that it should be risen life — that this life in resurrection together with Christ should so signally mark it.” Very possibly you do not; but allow me to say that full victory already achieved and made ours in Christ widely differs from life struggling with death; life with the handwriting uneffaced and contrary to us in ordinances; life not yet delivered from the power of the evil that surrounds it; life seeking after what is good though failing; life striving to avoid what is bad, yet constantly drawn somehow or other into it. This is precisely the state of man where the delivering power is unknown. But it was closed for the believer, as far, at any rate, as showing the new place into which the believer is put by the death and resurrection of our Lord. The life that one receives now in the Lord Jesus is life not under the law — life not having to do with the earth or its ordinances. It is the life of One who has brought me into perfect peace with God. It is the life of One who has put me in possession of His own relationship with God. Accordingly, it is as giving this in its most intrinsic form and its fullest power that our Lord Jesus Christ thus breathed to show the new character of life, so to speak, that was given them — that the life that they lived in the flesh was really by the faith of the Son Himself: “Not I, but Christ that liveth in me.” This, then, was given by the notable fact that He thus breathed upon them. It was a partaking of Himself as He then stood — a participation in what He was, specially in the life that was in Him, after all questions

of good and evil were settled, and perfect deliverance from sin and death was won by Him and given to them.

Hence it is that the apostle Paul, referring to this, says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.”1 Why? “For,” says he, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” “The law of the Spirit of life” is the phrase of the apostle Paul. This is the very life, as John tells us, that was here given. If in being born again (John 3) one was born of water and Spirit, much more was it here the Holy Ghost received; but it was the Holy Ghost as the Spirit of life. It was not the Spirit of external power working miracles, or any such energies — things which to men might appear to be far greater. Much less was it anything so wanton as men taking the place of God, and professing to forgive sins on the earth: to this no apostle ever pretended. Nevertheless it is a real privilege, and as true now as on the day when Jesus rose from the dead. What the Holy Ghost then did was simply communicating life according to its resurrection power and character through Jesus Christ, the Second man risen from the dead and withal the Divine Person, the Son, giving life no less than the Father.

But He adds more: “Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” Someone may ask, “Well, do you believe this?” Assuredly I do; and more than this, I believe that you, Christians, having the Spirit, possess the power and are responsible to God to walk in it. (Gal. 5:25) But this is a high claim, some will think — this power of remitting sins and retaining sins. Without doubt it is so. But to whom did the Lord speak on that day? Not to the apostles only, nor even to all of them, but to the

disciples. “Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled.” Surely, if it had been some restricted prerogative confined to the company of apostles, some care would have been taken to make this appear. It is thus that even a sensible man acts. If there were a special communication from the Queen to her cabinet ministers, it would not be made to the House of Commons or to the House of Lords either. Where would be the propriety in such a course? Whereas, on the contrary, if we suppose a royal message were delivered to the House of Lords, or to the House of Commons, to whom would this be understood to be addressed? If meant for the whole house it would be addressed accordingly. And so it is here. Our Lord was speaking to the disciples; He was addressing the whole of them. The moment we take the word as it is written we see clearly that what He said applies to all. Will any man say that the resurrection-life of the Lord Jesus Christ was only for the twelve? Shall I be told that the peace the Lord gave so solemnly and repeatedly was only for the apostles? Nothing of the sort: though of course the apostles shared it, and it must have had a most valued place in their souls.

There was, indeed, special authority from the Lord to form assemblies confessing His name, and to rule them when formed, not to speak of powers which were personal. There was a post of authority in laying the foundation; there were also acts initiatory and regulative which Scripture assigns to the apostles. But it is so little the aim or the character of John’s Gospel to dwell on what was official, that the very word “apostle” never occurs throughout its course save in John 13:16.

The spirit, form, and substance of it are devoted to what is intrinsic and essential and what passes not away. More particularly we shall have reason to gather in a moment that this very portion is the express setting of Christianity on its proper basis, and stamps on it a very distinctive character before God and man. For various reasons, therefore, I am persuaded that we are not to look for the accomplishment of these words in anything that was personal to the twelve, still less to any others imagined to succeed them; least of all are they to be construed of the function of elders or presbyters, as if they were officially entrusted with remitting and retaining sins, as is most deliberately assumed in the standards of certain religious bodies. The truth is that the Lord Jesus has the “disciples” as such before Him, and to them He imparts the Spirit as the power of risen life; them He thereon charges with this spiritual commission.

Does the inspired history, then, do the epistles give no light how the apostles understood, and how we are to interpret, Christ’s words? Take, for instance, those converted on the day of Pentecost, and others whom the Lord added from time to time: by whom were their sins remitted? They were not satisfied with individually believing the Gospel; they submitted their confession of the Lord’s name to those who were Christians before them. And a most important thing this is. I am not entitled to set up to be a Christian on my sole opinion of myself, on my judgment of the faith I confess.

Are we not bound to submit our pretensions to those who have been in Christ before us? Miraculous as may be the call of Saul of Tarsus, even he, though an apostle by call, was not exempt from this duty; he was baptised

by a certain disciple; he was subsequently received by others. This is full of instruction and comfort. It is real presumption to shrink from or weaken it, because the more really a man has faith, the more willing he is to let others examine it. Even the apostle Paul had to taste the bitterness of this at first, for some were in doubt of him. Surely if this most honoured of Christ's servants had to bear with not a little that was trying to him, it is not for any of us to count ourselves too sure confessors of His name to yield for a little our own importance, and, at the same time, to submit to that which is the Lord's will, and of vast moment for the blessing of the Church of God. Think how the enemy might take advantage if you supposed it was a question of setting up to be a Christian on one's own sole and independent warrant. It is good to be subject one to another, and this from the first, in the fear of God, who is wiser than men, and has laid down His will through these words of the Lord Jesus.

This, if we accept the apostolic writings as a comment, is the manner and practical working of it. When one professes to turn to God in repentance and faith, when one believes in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of the soul, then one must "confess" with the mouth, as well as "believe" in the heart. This confession may and should, of course, go out as a testimony to the world; but it belongs to those who are the confessors of His name to judge of it. I may admit something that is derogatory to Christ; I may overlook that which is injurious to my own soul and offensively evil to others. Then comes in the all-important function of those in the faith before, to which Scripture attaches no small

weight, and regulates it for God's glory, as we find the apostle Paul doing in Romans 15.

I affirm, then, that the disciples, as the assembly of God, did warrant the remission of sins in certain cases, and did retain sins in others. Since they received heartily and simply, owning as the brethren of Jesus those that before then had been wallowing generally in sins of every kind, and suddenly (it might be in an hour) turned to God, was it not of exceeding moment that there should be a company in this world constituted by the Lord, having distinct responsibility, as well as possessed of capacity in His own life, even the Spirit as the power of abundant life in resurrection, and that they should endorse the confession of those accredited true, while examining the pretensions of all who professed? It is not, of course, that this could in the long run be injurious to a child of God, but, on the contrary, be a signal mercy and comfort, even an additional joy to his heart — the welcome of others in owning him here below — as the angels, instead of man here, rejoice over the repentant in God's presence. Consider what a serious check it would be were there any reserve, or again if anything evil lurked underneath, or the mere desire to bring in people privily.

We find that in this spirit, accordingly, the assembly of God did act They remitted sins and they retained them. I speak not now of the solemn case where a man and his wife were successively struck dead on the spot, and also of a baptised man rejected almost immediately. (Acts 8) But we read also how the apostle insists on the saints putting away one that sinned grievously, and on their restoring him when duly repentant. Here, then, is the case in which a man who had been received, and had his

sins thus publicly remitted, was put out from them as a wicked person. (1 Cor. 5) This offender, when broken down, they were to receive back. (2 Cor. 2) Thus the two Epistles to the Corinthians illustrate both sides. “Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that you would confirm love toward him.” (2 Cor. 2:6-8) Here, then, we have the cases of remitting sins on the one hand, and of retaining sins on the other. Can there be a doubt that one of the reasons why Christians have failed to carry out their separate place in this world, and thus to walk in their proper joy and delight, and as a rich means of blessing to others, is that they have lost sight of this responsibility, treating it as either ministerial, or as a power long passed away?

Alas! the cause is as obvious as it is humiliating. The Church has not kept its place as in the Spirit a people separate to God, endowed with the love and glory of the Lord Jesus. They have taken in all the world in a misnamed “judgment of charity”; but no judgment of charity can avail unbelievers, nor is it really in question for believers, who by faith stand in God’s favour. Thus the deep and public landmarks of grace and holiness have been broken down; and, consequently, the very profession to retain or to remit sins, except for the superstitious as a sacerdotal act, is scouted, because its nature is wholly ignored. It is as a fact attached to the disciples collectively by the risen Lord Himself since the day of His resurrection.

The Lord’s words make it to be of the essence of the Christian congregation in this world to stand forth as publicly owning what grace has done, by receiving those whose confession satisfies, and as publicly refusing what does not approve itself to their conscience.

Let me, however, press with decision, that what we receive is not a certain amount of intelligence. It is not for me any more than others to make light of spiritual understanding, Unquestionably it has its place, season, and value; but of this we may be assured, that what Jesus breathed on the disciples was not merely intelligence, but His own resurrection-life in the Spirit. This, then, is what He would have us own; this is what we are bound to recognise in those that come forward. “You hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.” I do not mean thereby that we are to sanction what is sinful along with life in Christ. But we are bound to accept the sheep and lambs of Christ, and to be very tender in dealing with mistakes, the fruit very often of a wrong position and of bad teaching. Let us beware of playing into the enemies’ hands by even seeming to mix up the ground of reception with points of attainment in practice or in doctrine. Hold fast the grand, simple, but infinite fact, that Jesus breathed the Spirit of His own resurrection-life on the disciples. We are to treat the feeblest as a part of the Christian assembly.

But if we receive on the one hand, let us not fear to reject on the other, according as the confession may or may not be suitable to the name of Jesus. If a man really has the resurrection-life of Christ, one looks for holiness with a purged conscience; but let us press also another thing — that Christ be the standard of all his judgments,

as He is the source of all his blessings, and withal the object to be kept before his soul. Therefore the name of Jesus, which is the sole and sufficient passport to the simplest possessor of eternal life in Him, is the same name by which we can reject the loudest pretension that compromises His glory. Let the Lord Jesus be for us, as in truth He is, the perfect and only personal standard. If Christ is owned and honoured, His name and His word, it is well and safe and blessed.

The attempt to unite Christ with sin is fatal. All thought of having Christ and playing fast and loose with His name be far from us! What can be more offensive to God? Therefore it is of all-importance that we should steadily have Him before our eyes, and avoid the snare of building up the ecclesiastical plans and developed theories we have left behind. All ecclesiastical theory is assuredly false when in any measure allowed to shroud the glory and value of Christ. Not less firmly should we refuse to treat ecclesiastical mistakes as calling for such dealing as ought to be demanded were it a question of Christ dishonoured or positive known iniquity allowed. If there be so much as the connivance at the holding of what is not of Christ — if one bring not the doctrine of Christ, it is ruin. The man might appear to be as sound as an apostle on ecclesiastical truth and have every other New Testament doctrine at his finger-ends. But what is the value of anything where the name of the Lord is put to shame? On the other hand, where Christ is the object of the soul, though His confessor may be uninformed, has He not breathed His life there? and is not our course clear if we be subject to Christ? Let us welcome such a one to the heart in His name. It is the Church’s business to take all such up and to foster them;

for how are they to acquire more light, and where can they get the crooked joints adjusted, if it be not in God's Church? But if we hold aloof till they get all right, this is well-nigh an impossibility on their part, as it is to forfeit our own place of help and duty. Methought that the Church of God was the pillar and ground of the truth, and that there only can the truth be truly learnt where it is lived in, and that those saints, ill-taught though they be, having received Christ have Christ within and Christ without. Do I want or boast of more? Why, then, should there be the slightest hesitation? See that ye neither offend nor despise one of these little ones.

The Lord enable His own to be thorough in removing difficulties and hearty in welcoming souls where there is no question of ungodliness in faith or ways. I do not say where the doctrine of justification by faith is held. Many a wickedness and a worldliness may be allowed where that great doctrine is confessed. But these words of our Lord Jesus Christ are a standing rule for the disciples, and we are responsible for acting on them. If we are met together in His name let there be a plain, unswerving expression of our place and privilege. Our action, our collective action, should be as firm for the truth as our individual wall; — that we have and supremely value Christ — that to those confessing Christ we are to remit sins, and, whenever there is anything inconsistent with Christ, we are no less to retain sins. We disown the pretension of doing either as between God and man: the Church never claimed such a right; the apostles never aspired to such a prerogative. But our Lord Jesus clearly here called the disciples to discharge the retention as well as the remission of sins, and this, as we have seen, was verified in the Christian assembly which exercised

both, not as a question for eternity between God and the soul, but administratively and now on earth as a duty to Christ in receiving the true or in rejecting the false, of putting away in prescribed cases or in restoring when repentance is plain.

W. K.

1 The latter clause in the Received Text, represented in the Authorised Version, has no sufficient authority. It hinders the immediate connection with the reasons given, first in verse 2, next in verse 3; and it undermines the assurance of verse 1 by turning into a condition what rightly follows as the consequence in verse 4.

The Unity of the Spirit, and what it is to keep it

Being notes of a lecture delivered in 1882 by W. Kelly.

Third Edition

Ephesians 4:3.

It is needless for one to insist at length on that which is sufficiently plain to every Christian reader — the importance which God attaches to keeping the unity of the Spirit. It is true that ‘endeavouring’ fails to give the real force of the word employed by the Spirit of God. ‘Endeavouring’ is an expression which in the ordinary language of the day is habitually applied to that which men essay or seek after, even if they have not a hope of accomplishing. They feel that they may fail, but at any rate they try or ‘endeavour’ to do this or that. Such is not the meaning of the word here, but rather zeal in heeding and carrying out what is already true, giving diligence ‘to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.’ This, however, shows that not mere effort to attain, but earnestness to maintain, is the exhortation intended.

For the unity of the Spirit is to faith a subsisting fact; and the keeping it is no less our present duty. It is not that we have unity of ours to make, or that God is to make it for us in heaven by and by. It is here and now that the Spirit has formed this unity, the keeping of which is clearly our responsibility on earth. No doubt there is much to learn from the fact that it really is, as it is called, ‘the unity of the Spirit.’ It is not at all mere unity on our part, nor is it the unity of the body, though

this is one result, but of the Holy Ghost who baptised into one body all who believe, whether Jews or Gentiles, bond or free. It puts forward the Divine agent, the efficient source and power of unity, the Holy Spirit; but it supposes and includes the one body, which itself is so positive and permanent a reality that expressions often used about it are proved thereby incorrect. Of rending the body we hear in man's language or writings, never in God's word. Just as a bone of Christ was not to be broken, so the body of Christ, the church, cannot be rent. 'There is one body, and one Spirit, even as there is one hope of our calling.' These are the vital, abiding, and unchangeable truths in that new relationship. As surely as one Spirit has been sent down from heaven, there is but one body on earth; but that which the members of the body are called to keep is the unity of the Spirit.

It is not, as many interpret it, the unity of the family where the Lord guides one and all in communion with the Father and the Son; which is no doubt a very desirable, right, and blessed thing in its place, but provided for rather in John 17:21, 22, than here. 'That all might be one,' in the Gospel of John, refers to our rising by grace above all that would set or keep us apart, one in the Father and the Son. So the Lord asked for us of the Father that we might be characterised by unity. But in the scripture before us, as in the writings of Paul generally, at least where the 'body' is introduced, it is another truth attaching to the same objects, yet not at all a contingent or changeable condition of soul, but the permanent and blessed fact, that God has established unity for His own glory by the presence of His Spirit, who has united us to Christ our exalted Head in heaven.

There is since Pentecost a divine unity on the earth; not the mere aggregate of the individuals evermore called by grace, but those now made one by the Spirit of God. There is thus a divine corporation on the earth, if one may be allowed to use so familiar an expression. This divine society — here below is not formed by the will of the persons who compose it, although it is to be supposed that their hearts if right and intelligent thoroughly go along with the grace that so united them. But the church or assembly of God is formed by God's will; as it was purposed by His grace, so is it made good livingly by His power, the Holy Ghost being the effectuator of this blessed unity. Hence the Spirit of God for that very reason has the deepest and the most intimate interest in carrying out this unity for Christ's glory according to the counsels of the Father. It is called the unity of the Spirit; yet let none imagine that he can intelligently keep the unity of the Spirit and forget for a moment in principle or practice the one body of Christ.

There are, of course, various ways in which the saints may fail to keep this unity; but there are two general though opposite directions in which the failure may work, which are as prevalent as they are manifest. The first is by setting up a unity larger than that of the Spirit; the second by making it less. There may be a worldly looseness on the one hand, or mere partyism on the other; and the danger is so great that only God's Spirit can keep us looking to Christ by the word. Whatever may be the object or excuse, the will of man himself must be at bottom the motive at work in opposition to God's will.

In the first case men are prone to enlarge the unity. They insist on taking in multitudes beyond the members

of the body of Christ, souls recognised as of Christ without adequate ground for it. Oh what dishonour to that excellent Name! I speak not of infirmity in accrediting any supposed to be true, but of the deliberate intention to accept, and treat as belonging to Christ's body, persons who do not themselves even profess to be His members, and have evidently never passed from death unto life. Rome, it is true, had so done in its medieval sway over the west; and the Eastern bodies, the Greeks, Nestorians, etc., were no better, any more than the Catholic church before that great rent which set them at variance. They had all sought and received the world by means of fleshy ordinances, apart from faith and the reception of the Spirit. The Reformation, much as it did, in no adequate way rectified this radical error. Protestantism rejected the woman ruling over the nations, and if possible all nations; but, ignorant of the unity of the Spirit, it set up in each realm, where its influence extended, its own independent religion as by law established.

Such is the well-known principle of nationalistic bodies, wherever found, whether in England or in Scotland, in Germany or in Holland. They profess to receive all decent people in the districts or parishes. It is avowedly a religion for every body, and in no way the intention or the desire to incorporate none that are not living members of Christ. Birth or local connections are allowed unless there be open scandal. There is no demand of life or faith, still less of the gift of the Holy Ghost, as of old (Acts 11:16, 17). It is rather such a pattern as Israel affords, not the church wherein is neither Jew nor Greek but all are one in Christ Jesus. It is a question of family life and of geographical limits,

and people are not Israelites or heathen but own the Christian religion, being in what is commonly called a national church: yet is it not clear that in a national church the unity of the Spirit cannot possibly be kept? One may be a true christian, or child of God, but there is neither the thought nor the possibility for a member of a national church to keep therein ‘the unity of the Spirit.’ Hence they speak of the Church of England, not of the church of God in England: still less do they contemplate all that are Christ’s on the earth.

The fact is that, in escaping from Babylon, they have come to acknowledge a unity wholly different from, and opposed to, that of the Spirit. They have set up a unity which, if carried out with complete success, would comprehend the whole nation, saving perhaps those who eschew all show of religion. For I do not forget that the Rubric provides against heinous or manifest scandal. Notoriously, however, in every quarter, and almost in every family, there may be persons of more or less respectability, moral and amiable men, who know they are not born of God, and would shrink from pretending to be members of Christ, if they were not misled to claim the place on ritual ground. Most of these would shrink from being called ‘saints,’ and hesitate not to apply the word as a cant term of reproach to God’s children who are not ashamed to call themselves what they are.

Clearly then such as disclaim the name thus are not saints, unless you can honestly conceive of a believer so sunk or dark as to make a scorn of God’s designation for His children. And you may rest assured without a doubt that he who thinks and talks so does not walk as becomes a saint. Now if a man is not what scripture calls a saint, he is certainly not a Christian, except for

God’s judgment of his hollow profession. Is it not plain that a Christian is a saint, and a good deal more? There were saints in Old Testament times; there were saints before the cross of Christ; but were they really Christians so called? A Christian is a saint since redemption, one who is separated to God by faith of the gospel, in the power of the Holy Ghost, on the ground of the work of Christ. Whatever he may have been naturally before, God has quickened him together with Christ, having forgiven all his offences; and now, brought nigh by the blood of Christ, he draws near to God as a child. He is also a member of Christ’s body.

Now these are the persons who are called in the bond of peace to keep with diligence the unity of the Spirit, setting their faces against everything which might falsify that unity. It is not merely that the Spirit inwardly, and the personal conduct outwardly, must be suitable to it, which of course is true; but if the affections and walk were ever so excellent, it would be a serious thing for the Christian to annul or overlook the expression of that unity. Yet does not every believer dishonour it who owns any unity whatever that is not of the Holy Ghost? If he owns the fellowship of nationalism in this or any other country, is it not clear that he is off the ground on which scripture places all the saints? As a nationalist, how can he be keeping the unity of the Spirit? He may behave as a true child of God otherwise; in general he may walk worthily of all respect and love; and certainly he ought to be an object of tender concern to any who are zealous in keeping the unity of the Spirit. For if true to their calling they must pray for the deliverance of all the children of God who are not in this following the will and word of the Lord Jesus.

Unquestionably those who own a unity which takes in the flesh, on the basis of rites open to all the world, are on ground far wider than that of the Spirit, and cannot be walking in accordance with it., True unity is exclusive of every other; as you cannot serve two masters, you cannot share a twofold communion. The unity of the Spirit admits of no rival.

But there is another form of departure from the truth which may hinder God's children from keeping the unity of the Spirit. By misuse of doctrine or discipline they may form a unity not only in fact but in principle and design narrower than Christ's body. Are such on God's ground? I trow not. They may openly draw up their own form of government, or they may privily have an understood, though unwritten, system of rules which exclude saints as godly as themselves who cannot accept these rules. Here we have a sect. Their decrees are not the commandments of the Lord, yet they become practically as authoritative as His word, or (as is usual) yet more so. What is it for men to pretend that they have no human rules, when they introduce some unheard of conditions of fellowship, here rigidly, there loosely, according to varying policy or the caprice of their rulers, for those who come within their range? Anything of this nature takes the shape, not exactly of nationalism, but of sectarianism, which (instead of too wide or loose borders) rather seeks to split up those who should be together, making their communion express their difference from their brethren, and in no way standing together on that unity which is of God. It is in principle sectarianism; and, if they know better, they are more guilty than ordinary dissenters.

Under this head we find God's children often scattered through the pressure of questionable and even wrong discipline, or of unduly urged if not false doctrine. Some prefer a communion which is distinctively Arminian, or decidedly Calvinistic. Some might press particular views as to the coming and kingdom of Christ; others as to ministry, bishops, elders, etc.; others again as to baptism, the mode or the subjects. These ecclesiastical legislators seem not at all aware that their abuse of these doctrines or practices is incompatible with keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, they themselves being wrong, if not in their views, at least in the way they are pressed.

Behind these public and settled aberrations from the will of God about His children, it will be found that there lie predisposing causes that grieve the Holy Ghost and hinder the true and spiritual perception of the saint. The most personal and perhaps most common hindrances flow from the state of the soul, through ignorance of a full delivering gospel. Sin in these circumstances has never been thoroughly judged as before God, and consequently deliverance (Rom. 8:2) is but partially, if at all, known even in principle. Still less is there the power of the Spirit in unsparing application of death with Christ to self practically. Perhaps even the forgiveness of sins as a complete thing has been but feebly apprehended, as made apparent by the notion of the need of a fresh recurrence to the blood of Christ, or (as others would put it) of a constant process of cleansing going on, which they ground on a misunderstanding of the present tense in 1 John 1:7, ignorantly reducing it from its moral import to mere actual time. Others again have a wholly superficial and even fallacious view of the

world, as if it were now all consecrated to the Christian by that cross of Christ, whereby on the contrary the Christian is crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to him.

The flesh and the world being thus inadequately judged according to God's word in the light of the risen Christ, the heart is not in communion with God touching all within and without. Though there may be the utmost zeal for souls as far as their danger and God's pardoning grace are understood, and true and burning love that Christ should be honoured in their blessing, nature still has a large place, and the word and spirit of God do not absolutely govern the heart separate to Him who is dead, risen, and on high. In such a condition how can souls be expected to form a sound or spiritual judgment on the church, complicated as the question now is by its ruined state? They value science, letters, philosophy, which exalt the flesh, as well as associations which allow of ease and honour in the world. From lack of intelligence in the word, and feeble sense of fellowship with the Father and the Son, they fail to judge the present evil age and are absorbed in 'their own things,' if not ever seeking greater. They are consequently in danger of being the victims of prejudice and prepossession. They do not give to Christ His due and supreme place in a practical way; nor do they freely rise above brotherly kindness into the purer atmosphere of love according to God, so as to care for the church unselfishly as Christ's body. They are not prepared to break fully through the vain conversation which tradition has generated as much in Christendom as of old in Judaism. They shrink from the trying consequences which unhesitating and thorough

obedience of the truth must entail on every one who is subject to the Lord. The eye is not single, and therefore the body is not full of light; the path looks uncertain, the word seems difficult, and danger appears to lie in the faith that follows the Lord at all cost.

Are we then to fall back on prudence and require a certain measure of intelligence before reception? This is just one main mischief that has to be ever assiduously avoided, and treated as a mistake in principle, yea, a sin against Christ and the church. Nor could anything more directly tend to make the most sectarian of all sects than to exact, from the souls who seek to come in, a right judgment as to truth least known by the saints, the mystery of Christ, or in particular the one body for them made harder still, as it is apt to be in practice, by sections growing out of the actual fallen condition of Christendom.

Never was such a requirement heard of, even When the church began and the presence of the Holy Spirit was a wholly new thing. Saints were received on the confession of Christ’s name, God having given to all the like gift, His seal and passport. The intelligence was on the part of those who recognised the worth of that Name and the gift of the Spirit as to themselves at the beginning. Had they claimed intelligence of the church as a condition of fellowship, it would have really proved their own lack of intelligence, and counteracted that for which Christ died -the gathering together in one of God’s scattered children.

Has the present ruin of the church altered this primary principle? The firm foundation of God stands, but with this seal: The Lord knows them that are His; and, Let

every one that names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity. What bears His name is like a great house with vessels of honour, and vessels of dishonour, from which last a man has to purge himself, if he would himself be a vessel of honour, sanctified, meet for the master's use, prepared unto every good work. If the public state be evil, individual fidelity to Christ is imperative: unity is not to overbear it, nor bind the Christian to unite the Lord's name with unrighteousness. Personal purity is to be followed also; and this not in isolation but with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Not a word about requiring ecclesiastical or doctrinal intelligence, but 'with those that call' etc., i.e., with real saints in a day of lax and hollow profession.

At a later day, 'the last hour' of John, we see how strongly the spirit of God insists on first principles. 'Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?' In presence of many antichrists, Christ abides the touchstone. The spirit holds to His person unhesitatingly. To add aught is to take from Him, to dishonour His name.

Is then knowledge of truth or growth in spiritual intelligence to be slighted? In no way; but it is false and vain to require either as a preliminary condition from saints who seek fellowship according to God. Help them,

instruct them, lead them on in both. This is a true service, but arduous withal. The other is sectarian, and wrong.

If there are any who plead for so great a departure from Scripture and more especially from the characteristic truth of God's assembly, let them betray their new invention in opposition to the Lord, that others also may fear. Christ ever abides the one test, the only centre, to whom the Holy Spirit gathers. What the Lord declared just before the church began remains even more manifestly true, now that He is dishonoured in the house of His new friends no less than in that of His old. 'He that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad' (Matt. 12:30). It is imperative to be with Christ for one's soul, in order to please God and not dishonour His Son; but there is now the privilege and duty of gathering, as well as of individual allegiance; and he who does not gather with Him only scatters, whatever appearances may say to the contrary. It is the once rejected and dead, the now risen and glorified, Christ, who is the attractive centre; and hence the sign of His death in the breaking of bread is equally the sign of the one body, which they in effect deny and contemn who would restrain it to their few, refusing the many, that is, all whom Christ contemplates and welcomes. He has not asked this at their hands; nor does He sanction such action in His word. And if not warranted of Him, what is it but party and arbitrary restriction, which does not refuse the vile only but the precious, unless they fall in with their unauthorised course whether they think it right or not?

Thus the direct tendency is to coerce and demoralise; for what is sought is not conviction on ground of

Scripture, but, where there is no conviction, a blindfold subjection, a bare and often reluctant and unhappy acquiescence, an appearance of fellowship which is no longer living but dead. For the Spirit we have received is assuredly a spirit, not of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind; and in no way does He endorse what is thus formal in character, under human pressure or influence. The consequence is terrible: a premium to the more vaulting and turbulent spirits, who now more than ever would ‘hold the reins’; the comparative retirement, from their just and grace-given place, of those who care not ‘to rule save in the fear of the Lord and by His word; the destruction of moral principle in such (and they are very many) as seek to silence their disapproval of the movement as a whole and in detail, either by attachment to leaders, or in holding to the greater number, which they fondly call unity. Protest (say some), but stay within; that is, protest but only in word! This we used to regard as the painful compromise of place-loving evangelicals; now do we not see it standing where it ought not? It is anything but truth and right; and this unity!

But there is all the difference of truth and error, on the one hand, between consistency with the unity of the Spirit for Christ’s glory, carried out in holiness and grace according to His word, and, on the other, self-deceived and misleading abuse of unity to cry up a party bent on division with violence, which refused humiliation and prayer to arrest the evil, and declared Scripture needless for its demands or its justification.

No intelligent saint would ask for a positive letter of commandment, like a Jew; no one expects a modern place or passing circumstance to be named in the

Scripture: to speak as if anything of the sort were sought is to evade and condemn oneself yet more. Where is the scriptural principle for turning a local difference into a wedge of universal division? Beyond controversy, when a question is raised with a world-wide scattering of the saints as the penalty, all who love the church are bound to be assured that the test is of God according to His word.

Some of us remember such a test more than thirty years ago. But then it was whether we could consent to make a true or a false Christ an open question. This we rejected with horror, when a large company of saints adhered to their leaders (even while they ignored the judgment of the assembly where the evil occurred), who let in the known partisans of a proved anti-christian teacher, and denied formally their responsibility to judge it solemnly for themselves.

This was no test of man. It is the certain distinct requirement of the Lord. We are divinely commanded to reject any who bring not the doctrine of Christ (2 John). This goes far beyond the dealing due to those who act independently or make a sect. No ecclesiastical error, however real or grave, could justify such rigour.

The foundation truth of Christ demands it. We owe it to Him who is our Lord, who died for us, whose glory the word guards as nothing else. To say that then it was a question of the Head, now of the body, in order to put the two as much as possible on a level, is both want of faith in Him and want of intelligence in the word. It is an undue and even unholy exalting of the church, and so not only an unspiritual blunder but an evident excuse for yielding to sectarianism. We should never have been

warranted to have acted as we did in 1848-9, if Christ had not been blasphemed. As a test it is absolutely unscriptural to equalise the church with Him, even if it had been true, which it was not of late, that the one body was at stake, for the meeting wrongly begun was nowhere recognised.

The comparison is a sophism. For the question of old was not about Christ as Head at all, but about His person and relationship to God as such. An antichrist was taught; it was not a mere failure, bad as this may be, in holding His headship. And so far now from maintaining the unity of the Spirit, so far from acting faithfully on the ground of the one body, the object has been and is to force on us the recognition of a meeting which had deliberately gone out and set up in self-will as a party, a meeting that never yet adequately and honestly owned these public sins to those against whom they sinned, not to say to all saints. The aim, of course, really was division, for no sober Christian thought such ways right; but certain were resolved, cost what it might, to sever between those prepared to accept as of God a meeting guilty of unjudged party work, and those who cannot but reject such independency for Christ's and the church's sake.

If this is not a human test, and as the result a sect, it would be hard to find either; for the ground is not even a difference of doctrine, still less as to Christ, but at most a question of discipline, even if the discipline were right. But I will go further. Take the hope of the return of the Lord Jesus. You know how very important it is for Christians to be waiting in truth and heart for Christ from heaven; but would you require that those who seek fellowship in the name of the Lord should understand

and confess that hope before you receive them in the Lord?

Would not this be a sect? Be it that your assertion of the Christian hope is ever so right, and that the person in quest of fellowship is ever so ignorant on that subject; but who authorises you or others to stand at the door and forbid his entrance? Perhaps by entertaining some wrong thought, he may fancy that the Christian, like the Jew, or the Gentile in Rev. 7, has to go through the great final tribulation. Granted that he little understands the place of the Christian from not seeing his union with Christ in heaven, which is made known by the Holy Spirit in this day. Hence he is in confusion and knows not that the Lord will come and take His own before the days of that terrible retribution which is coming upon the world. He may even share the thoughts of men,is unwise as any in Thessalonica and fall into the delusion of trying to escape the great tribulation, as some did forty years ago by going to Canada. Too much occupied with prophecy, they had lost or never known the true hope of Christ's coming; and whenever we get absorbed in anything, whether prophecy, or the church,* or the gospel, rather than with Christ, what but grace can hinder us from going farther astray?

If any one wants proof of the schismatic misuse of truth at work, he can see it in the 'Voice' for August, 1882, where the writer is so betrayed by his anti-evangelistic zeal as to say that 'a company of saints gathered by an evangelist seldom is sound in principle' (p. 247)! This crying up of one's own line is as unsound in heart as it is in principle; an offence alike against grace and truth. Every right-minded evangelist hails with] joy the service of pastors and teachers, that they may perfect the work.

begun by the Lord through himself. But if these ἀλλοτριοεπίσκοποι were not blinded by self-occupation they would rejoice in the blessing (or what they call ‘the success’) of the evangelist, as alone furnishing them with a sphere for their own ministry: for how in general are saints to be called and gathered if not by the evangelist? And think of the confusion in what follows, where brethren from whom these men differ are contrasted with ‘a member (however unintelligent) of the body of Christ’ (page 248)! Is the evangelist then not a member of that body? The apostle (Eph. 4:11, 12) ruled differently his place, relation, and function; but this pretentious school not infrequently show the worth of their intelligence by independence of Scripture. If this be the sort of thing the sheep now get, they are truly to be pitied.

And this brings me to the main point I would now press. The unity of the Spirit embraces not only the intelligent but the simplest of God’s children; it contemplates the body of Christ, and all the members in particular. For those who believe the gospel of salvation have the Holy Ghost dwelling in them and are Christ’s members. They are therefore responsible to walk, as we are to own Him, in that relationship which grace has given to all. As members of Christ’s body, they are bound diligently to keep the unity of the Spirit. There are national bodies and dissenting societies which have within them many, if not the mass, of God’s children; and these systems, by claiming to be churches, prove a great perplexity to the believer. The evil of party, which showed itself in the early days, not only repeats itself, but works now with very great aggravation. Notwithstanding, grace would strengthen those who seek to do Christ’s will according

to their true relationship. It is man, and man pushed on by the enemy, that makes stumbling-blocks and difficulties great, yea, in appearance insuperable, so that the children of God may be tempted to give up true unity. Of course every faithful servant of the Lord has to seek, if not the removal of these obstacles, at least to help God's children in surmounting them. In a day of growing confusion, the constant effort of the enemy is to deceive and baffle and make it seem hopeless to keep the unity of the Spirit.

It is for us to consider whether we are using diligence to keep that unity in peace. No doubt there are internal dispositions or conditions requisite to do it aright. Some say the mystery must be known. Of such intelligence I do not doubt the importance in its place and time; but of this the apostle hints not a word here. What does he say? 'With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.' Such are the declared and worthy qualities which the apostle seeks in those who would keep the unity of the Spirit.

And is it not well for us to challenge our souls, whether our confidence is in the apostle's word or in man's theories? Oh, that we might cultivate such ways of grace as these in ourselves, and urge them on others, in order to a walk worthy of our calling! Can we doubt that it is in this condition only that we can duly keep that unity: not in haste or harshness, not in impatience of others or self-confidence, but with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love? There was need of all this then: is it less indispensable in our greater difficulties now?

For then there was no perplexity through open rivals, no competitors for the claim of God's assembly on earth. The main hindrance was from within. Now there are those and other obstacles. Am I connected with any association which ignores the one body and one Spirit? Am I attached to anything that systematically opposes this unity? It is not a question merely of wrong persons coming in unawares; for the fatal thing is not that evil should enter, but that it is known and allowed. What evil things did not effect an entrance into the assembly even in apostolic days? But God owns the unity as of the Spirit so long as there is the true-hearted purpose, in dependence on the Lord and according to His word, to keep, or purge, out evil. It is not the entrance or amount or even character of evil that destroys the assembly, but the continued acceptance of it under the Lord's name, even when it is known.

But God will not sanction in His assembly the allowance of any real evil whatever; and evil, no matter what its shape or measure, must be judged as inconsistent with His presence who dwells there. The assembly is the pillar and ground of the truth: how then can falsehood be a matter of indifference in the house of the living God? Christ is the truth; and, without controversy, great is the mystery of piety. Hence the church's intolerance of that which undermines Christ. There must be the disallowance of all leaven where the feast of Christ the paschal Lamb is kept. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump; and none can be tolerated, be it moral, as in 1 Cor. 5, or doctrinal, as in Gal. 5. If one called a brother be characterised by corruption or violence, by ways wholly opposed to the truth and character of Christ and to the

very nature of God, he must be excluded from His assembly.

What then is to be done if we find views, judgments, and principles at work which trench on and narrow, and so really counteract, the Spirit's unity? What if unscriptural tests be pressed so as to shut out deliberately souls at least as godly as themselves? What if conscience toward God be not respected, if there be no longer room for liberty in the Spirit and responsibility to the Lord Jesus? Were it merely an opinion of one or more, which was held without forcing it on others, there would be in this no sufficient ground for resistance. It would be sad to see saints preoccupied with their little theories in presence of Christ and that word which lives and abides for ever. Ordinarily it would suffice to express regret at, and protest against, what one might believe unsuitable among Christians; for we are called to peace and forbearance as well as fidelity. If you find in others what you cannot approve of, does not Scripture amply forewarn you of this, and call for patience, whilst looking to the Lord?

The children of God, called though they be to the enjoyment and expression of Christ, habitually demand the exercise of long-suffering and grace, as beyond doubt you yourself draw largely on the forbearance of your brethren. It cannot seriously be expected that those who compose the church of God should forego the character of a family, with its fathers, young men, and babes, to imitate an army under martial law. Regimental order is as far as possible from that which the written word prescribes to God's church, where, instead of a regulation standard, the utmost variety prevails, high and low, strong and weak, or even uncomely. 1 Cor. 12.

Scripture lays down the rule by which foreign elements, if they enter, are to be tried; and as there are manifold evils that may seek a footing, so there are distinct scriptures that apply to each case, from private rebuke to public censure, or in the last resort putting away. Those who cause divisions and stumblings are to be avoided; the factious, after a first and second admonition, to be refused; the disorderly, to be withdrawn from; those that sin, to be reproved before all; the wicked, to be put away. Reserve and rebuke have their application, no less than the extreme sentence of excision.

Nor would one deny the just practice of declaring outside those who have either gone away, wilfully refusing all admonition, or who audaciously despise and deny the unquestioned assembly by setting up another meeting, and so render admonition to be scarce more than a form.

The lesser excommunication was not yet invented, that is, the ‘declaring out,’ so stretched as to take in brethren who had no intention of going out: a convenient, but unscriptural way of getting rid of such as gave umbrage. Surely whatever is done ought to be according to the plain positive teaching of God’s word. It is for the Lord to command — the church has only to obey. I take for granted that I address Christians who believe not more in the sufficiency of the written word than in the supreme authority of Him who wrote it for our guidance by the Spirit of God. Development is of man’s will, and unbelief. God has left nothing to be added. The church is under the orders of the Lord. If the church recognise any one, it is because the Lord has already received him; and if the church put away, it is

simply as doing the Lord's will. The church has no independent authority to legislate, but is called to believe, pronounce, and execute His word, Consequently, in all things the church has to remember that she is subject and He the Lord. He is to order, she to obey — her one place, privilege, and duty. The moment the church lays down an extra-scriptural test, she takes the place of the Lord, and there is a practical assumption, yea, a virtual denial, of His authority. The result is to form a sect in departure from the unity of the Spirit.

The apostles, though set first in the church, were patterns of Christian humility. Who was so remarkable for patience as he who was not a whit behind the very chiefest, to whom a unique place was given by the will of God and the authority of the Lord Jesus? How much then should every true servant of Christ cultivate lowliness in these days! If a man think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things written are the commandments of the Lord. Let his very subjection to the word of the Lord prove the reality of his mission from Him. This is of the last moment for our souls now; for perils and perplexities are constantly springing up, which affect the saints wherever they may be, and not least those who are gathered to the name of Christ.

Let none fancy this is to disparage those admirable men whom the Lord used in days gone by. Cherish unfeigned respect for such as Luther, Calvin, Farel, and Zwingle, though quite allowing the infirmities of everyone of them. It is childish to find fault with Tyndale and Cranmer, whilst idolising Melancthon or John Knox. They were all of like passions as ourselves; and if

disposed to study their lives and labours, there are ample materials not far to seek for criticism; and so with other men of God in our day. But is it of Christ to be on the watch for that which may not be of Christ? Faults are easily seen; it needs today the power of the Spirit to walk, not in their traditions, but in the like faith. Rarely has there been a time when faith has sunk to a lower ebb among those who might be supposed long inured to it than the present. It is most common to find saints who groan over a course as utterly wrong, and yet persevere in it for the sake of company, etc. How often they have to others insisted on the ancient oracle: ‘Cease to do evil; learn to do well.’ They believe it doubtless: why not, giving all diligence, add to their faith virtue? Have they lost all courage in Christ and for Christ? I speak of what is now going on to our common shame all over the world. The compromise which you would hardly expect in new-born babes of God characterises men who have long known the Lord, and even suffered not a little at one time or another for the truth’s sake.

Beloved friends, it is of the greatest moment that we should try our ways, whether we deceive ourselves, or are in deed and in truth keeping the unity of the Spirit. Do not set against that duty the sad fact that the church is now a ruin. The question is, Are we not always to be obedient? It is not the point, how many or how few of Christ’s members may act together according to the word of the Lord. Do we own, ourselves, the obligation to be thus faithful? The unity of the Spirit is a constant responsibility for the children of God to keep with diligence as long as they are upon the earth. He abides with us for ever. To keep it therefore is always a paramount duty.

Take a practical illustration. There is assembled in this room a company of members of Christ's body, who can allow neither the broad ways of nationalism nor the narrow alleys of sectarianism. They desire above all things to walk together so as to please the Lord Christ. What then must be their stand? What position ecclesiastically ought they to take, if they would act with spiritual intelligence and fidelity? If any in this city be already gathered to His name on the ground of the one body, they should not be ignored. It would be independence, not the unity of the Spirit, to take no account of such a gathering. The member of Christ's body who sought fellowship would ask, as he ought, if and where saints were gathered to His name. He finds, we will suppose, there are some meeting in this room, and prefers his desire to be with them on the same blessed ground of Christ. If they challenge his faith, it is not from lack of love to him, but from care for Christ's glory. They do not receive him because he says that he is a member of Christ's body, They require adequate testimony, where they have no personal knowledge. Nobody ought to be recognised on his own bare word; even the apostle Paul was not at the first. God took care to give an extraordinary witness through a certain disciple named Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews that dwelt in Damascus, as in Jerusalem subsequently through Barnabas. The word is so plainly thus, and the danger so great otherwise, that no saint, who duly reflects with a heart and conscience true towards God, would wish to be accredited merely on his own word. Souls may deceive themselves, even if upright; but if you or I were to be so accredited, where is it to end?

Again, a christian is brought before them, who desires to remember the Lord along with them. Perhaps he belongs, as they say, to the national establishment, or to a dissenting society. But he is well known as a child of God, walking according to the measure of light already possessed. What is to be done? To refuse this member of Christ, without the strongest ground of known sin, would put shame not on him only but on the Lord. It were to deny our title, the true centre of gathering. Membership of Christ attested by a godly life is the sufficient and only right ground on which a Christian should ask to be received. If one understood all mysteries and all knowledge, if one had all faith so as to remove mountains, one ought to plead His name alone.

Are there then no exceptions? May there not be valid reasons to forbid even an accredited member of Christ's body? Certainly there are, as Scripture shows. Leaven of malice and wickedness is intolerable (1 Cor. 5); leaven of heterodoxy as to the foundations (Gal. 5) is yet worse; and the word is, 'Purge out the old leaven that ye may be a new lump.' Here are unquestionable barriers reared in the word of God, and due to the Lord Jesus. If any man that is named a brother be unclean in deed or in word, in ways or in manifested spirit, we are commanded not so much as to eat with him. And it were a far graver sin, if one did not bring the doctrine of Christ, or even denied everlasting punishment for the lost. God assuredly will never allow the profession of Christ to be a passport for him that dishonours Christ. Here, and here most of all, is the Holy Ghost jealous, if the word of God is to be our rule.

All truth is no doubt important in its place and season; but it is worse than ignorance to put the body on the

same level as the Head. Ecclesiastical error, even if real and grave, never approaches the denial of the doctrine of Christ. Weigh how the apostle of love, the elder, solemnly warns us to be on our guard in such a case. We are not free to receive even privately, much less publicly, those who bring not the doctrine of Christ. We are unequivocally bound not only to disallow heterodoxy in general, but in particular to reject that which is, and those who are, a lie against Christ, yea, to treat those who receive such as partakers of the same evil deeds. But we are not entitled to equalise the church with Christ, like a Romanist, or to put ecclesiastical error along with evil against Christ's person. This is not faith, but fanaticism: what can we think of such as conceive, or of those that circulate, this trash as the truth?

Still, in keeping the unity of the Spirit, we must accept the scriptural responsibility of purging out leaven. And, as we have seen, the Spirit of God writes direct to an elect lady and her children, because on such a question as Christ the duty is immediate and peremptory. Years ago, in having to do with such an one, that Epistle stood us in good stead. For on her pleading that she was but a sister, and it was not her responsibility to do this or that, she was at once reminded that, it was not to an assembly, nor even to a Timothy or Titus, but to a lady and her children that the Holy Ghost wrote, insisting on her own personal and unavoidable responsibility. We may be sure that the Spirit of God did not thus inspire a letter to a lady and her children, without the most urgent necessity, and in order to meet just such an excuse for shirking what is due to Christ at any time.

All know that women are liable to err on the side of their affections, being naturally more disposed to act through

feeling than with calm judgment. The word of God recognises this in repressing them ordinarily (1 Tim. 2), and in the special warning of 2 John. Their activity is always to be dreaded in cases short of Christ, a dishonour to themselves and to the men whom they mislead. The truth may not be always pleasant, though ever wholesome and good; and it is the truth that one desires to press upon souls, and that we ought to welcome. We are bound to see to it that the church of God be not made a cover for any known evil, and above all not to admit or screen knowingly that which sullies Christ's glory. But women are bad leaders or even instruments, save as Scripture warrants.

Let us distinguish things that differ. The English Establishment, in spite of many and grave drawbacks, had a holy object in its rise, turning its back as it did on an abominable and ever swelling imposture. Though much hindered, especially by the king, in its work of clearing itself from many inveterate superstitions, it honestly set its face against what was known to be evil. But it retrograded afterward, until its ritualistic observances being made a test forced out many pious nonconformists, whose origin thus was morally respectable and godly. For it was no mean struggle in those days to keep a good conscience, and to stand opposed to those who were dragging them down into formalism. We need not speak of the Wesley and Whitfield movement, which was in main missionary, not ecclesiastical We know later on, how powerfully God wrought in awakening His children fifty years ago to a sense of the departure that had taken place from the original ground of keeping the unity of the Spirit. In such days it was no small thing to recognise that there is

such a reality on earth as the presence of the Holy Ghost, and consequently the body of Christ. Hence, if members of that body, it is our inalienable duty to keep that unity in its true character, whilst subject to the conditions which the Lord has laid down in His word, and to none other. The Spirit has created that unity, a unity which takes in all members of Christ's body, excepting those whom discipline according to the word requires us to reject.

It may interest all to know that not the least weighty testimony that was ever given of late on this momentous subject was written in the year 1828 'Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ'. The point was to show how impossible it is for saints who would honour the Lord to go on with the world, instead of walking (were they but two or three) in that unity which is of God; that in denominations the bond is not their unity but in fact their differences, and in no case therefore the communion of God's church at all, in faith contemplating, as every true assembly does and must, all God's children. Those who call this looseness do not know divine ground, and have unwittingly slipped into a sect.

Far from looking for or valuing ecclesiastical intelligence before souls take their place at the Lord's table, it is quite a mistake for us to expect it, and a shame rather than an honour to the few who may possess it. For how did they as members of Christ acquire such knowledge? In manifest unfaithfulness; either still continuing in their denominational enclosures and activities with a bad conscience; or in the anomalous state of mere hearers outside, seeking to attain a more familiar acquaintance with that truth in which their outside position declared

them to have neither part nor lot, as if their heart were not right with God. Yet all the while they were members of the body of Christ; and as such they should have been within, learning more soundly and happily the truth they were acting on in their simplicity, a truer and better sort of intelligence than that intellectual insight into the church, which has been so erroneously over-rated by some in our midst.

The fact is that we are apt to forget our own beginnings and the gracious dealings of the Lord with us when we ourselves first broke bread, knowing as little perhaps as any. How many brethren are now among the firmest and most intelligent in fellowship, who saw but dimly not the church only but even the gospel of salvation, and revealed truth in general, when they found in the Lord's name an. immediate passport to His supper! They were by no means clear as to their future course, though attracted by the grace which saluted them as brethren, and enjoying the simple faith which bowed to the word of the Lord in a way and measure beyond their previous experience. How unwise and unbecoming for such now to exact from enquiring brethren a knowledge of the church far beyond their own standard at their start, and in fact not to be got save within the assembly, and in the path of obedience where the Spirit guides into all the truth! To those thus growing up and led, catholicism or denominationalism is judged by the word, and felt to be altogether unsatisfying and distasteful, as being evidently of man and not of God. What gives these new and strong convictions? Neither influence nor prejudice, neither argument nor imagination, but the truth appreciated by the power of God's Spirit.

Are we then to play fast and loose with divine truth! Nay, but it is a question of the Lord's way with those who are His and have yet to learn: is it to be in liberty or in bondage? Doubtless every Christian ought to keep the unity of the Spirit, as gathered to the name of the Lord and to none other. A saint cannot legitimately have two communions. Is not the communion of Christ's body in principle exclusive? Follow with all your soul the Lord Jesus, own the one body and one Spirit, receive every godly member of His in His name. In this there is neither looseness nor sectarianism. As the word of God is plain, so does the presence of the Spirit abide; nor do I allow that keeping the unity of that Spirit is a vain show. As He abides, so does His unity; and those who have received the Holy Spirit are bound to walk in that unity, and in none other. They are added of the Lord together, members of the assembly which God has formed for Himself in this world; and I deny the title of anyone to set up either rival or substitute. If you have His Spirit, you already belong to this one body, and are called to carry it out to the exclusion of all others.

Thus it is no voluntary society we have to do with. It is no question of framing something better than either nationalism or dissent, nor an alliance which really condemns, while ostensibly it sanctions, the existing institutions of orthodox Protestantism. The truth however, is that, before all these essays, God had Himself formed His church on earth; and such as have His Spirit are thereby constituted members, responsible to act accordingly. In His church leaven of doctrine or of practice is intolerable, if we bow to Scripture. Every Christian is bound to reject falsehood and unholiness, and this corporately as well as individually, For the ruin

of the church does not shut us up to individuality. If we follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, it may and should be with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Isolation it is a sin to seek, as being a denial of fellowship. The church of God means the assembly of those that are His. But if ever so many, we are one bread, one body. As the Lord's Supper is the outward expression of this unity, it is unworthy of believers to complain that too much is made of His Supper and Table; for it is God who calls them His, not we who only cleave to His word and confide in His will. Doubtless we need to keep Christ in this before our eyes; if not, we are in danger of moulding His Supper according to our will or caprice. If by the grace of God we have the Lord Jesus before us, our hearts will go out towards all that are His walking after a godly sort.

For a long time Satan has been endeavouring to falsify the testimony of Christ amongst those professedly gathered to His name. One of his wiles has been, under pretence of light and righteousness, to undermine grace and truth in recognising freely the members of Christ's body. Utterly misconceiving the stand against neutrality, they would make no Christian welcome to the Lord's Table who did not judge his old position by more or less intelligence of the one body and one Spirit; that is, without a virtual pledge never again to enter their so-called church or chapel. This is, to my mind, not unbelief only but a bad and base principle. It is in an underhand way to make a sect of those that know the church, but really to prove how little they themselves appreciate the one body: else they could not let knowledge override relationship to Christ, as they do. Never is the church rightly or truly learnt save within, according to the

word, where you must leave room for growth in the truth by faith and God's grace.

There is then the danger of virtually denying Christ's membership by looking for an antecedent intelligence about His body which it is as unscriptural as unwise to expect, and the more wrong as it exists but feebly in many who have for years been in fellowship. But besides, there may be no less difficulty and danger among those already received, where the claim of truth or righteousness is pressed without grace. And those who are most wrong are apt to talk most loudly of that which they really imperil or unwittingly annul.

There are not many who remember the Plymouth division in 1845-6. Moral charges were not wanting then, but it mainly turned on an effort of a large and influential party which lost faith in the Lord's presence and the Holy Spirit's free action in the assembly, seeking independency with its leaders. It is needless to say that the heavenly character and the unity of the church had faded away, as well as waiting for the Lord Jesus as an immediate hope. God would not suffer in our midst such lack of faith and of faithfulness. But the mass of the saints were beguiled by the error, and deaf to the warning; and but few separated, branded as schismatics by those who boasted of their numbers, gifts, and happiness.

What was the relation of those who for the Lord's and the truth's sake were forced in conscience to stand apart? The high-minded majority utterly refused humiliation and rejoiced that those were outside from whom they had been long and with increasing bitterness alienated. The minority met at first in private houses

only to humble themselves and pray, as after a little to break bread. But they never thought of rejecting the poor famished sheep who occasionally sought to break bread with them, without severing their connection with Ebrington Street. For indeed they were not only bound there by many ties, but under great fear through the swelling words and persecuting deeds of their old leaders and friends, not least of sisters who played an unenviable part in that sad history. They had of course this moral safeguard that none committed in will to the Plymouth defection, especially no chief, but scorned the seceders. Only the simple came, and, because they came, were cut off by the Ebrington Street party. But we received them freely in the Lord's name, even though they might be weak enough to wish fellowship still with their old friends.

But the moment that the blasphemous heterodoxy as to Christ appeared, there was an end of all this forbearance. The door was closed on all that continued with an antichristian faction. As long as it was an ecclesiastical error, however firmly we refused it and came out from it, there was patience with those who failed to discern it, or to judge it practically. Such known saints of Ebrington Street as came were cordially received; and who ever heard of even one in these circumstances refused? But on the contrary, when the false doctrine against Christ was known, an uncompromising stand was made from the first; and no soul was received thenceforward who did not clear himself from association with so deadly an insult to the Father and the Son. With partisans of that evil Bethesda identified itself, and necessitated the world-wide division which ensued in 1848.

What then can be judged of those who confound these two things so fundamentally distinct? the ecclesiastical error, and the false doctrine as to Christ's person and relationship to God? or the ways to be pursued in each case?

The divisionist party of today seems to me as guilty of independency and clericalism as that of Ebrington Street in 1845. And, believing them to be thus false to the truth of the one Spirit and one body, I cannot but feel thankful for God's overruling grace in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. For their intolerance of others has taken the initiative; and they have either gone out from, or driven out (too often by unworthy manoeuvres), their brethren whose one desire is to abide gathered, as we have so long been, to Christ's name. But they have proved their ignorance in the plainest way and to a surprising degree by prating malicious words about Bethesdaism, when they might know, if not blinded by haste and ill-feeling, that there is not allowed a shade of that evil for which Bethesda and the so-called neutrals were judged.

Let them beware lest, beginning with ecclesiastical error like Ebrington Street, they themselves fall ere long into like heterodoxy. I pray that in God's mercy our brethren may be spared such further sin and dishonour of the Lord. But detraction and neglect of Scripture and of facts as well as of consistency with all we have hitherto learnt and done before God, are a slippery bypath; from which it would be joy indeed and great grace from the Lord to see them recede.

The Spirit of God

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining upon him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost” (John 1:29-33).

Two works of our Lord are referred to here — what may be called His great earthly work, and His great heavenly work. On earth His work is — and what can be so great? — to take away the sin of the world; not only the sins of us who believe, but the sin of the world.

Did you ever, by the way, know one that quoted the phrase correctly? Have you ever seen it employed aright in any liturgy that ever was framed? I do not recollect it so much as even once, although familiar with rather many of such compilations. Evidently, the truth intended is not before hearts, nor even understood, but confounded with something different; and hence men cite the words falsely. This shows the all-importance for the truth of cleaving to the only unerring standard, the written word of God. Christ is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world; but the Holy Ghost in this connection carefully abstains from saying “sins.” It

is constantly assumed, when persons read the passage, that Christ has taken away the “sins” of the world. Now this would be another thing altogether, and confounds the text with 1 Peter 2:24.

When John the Baptist gave his testimony, in pointing Him out to his disciples, saying, “Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,” he did not mean that He was then effecting it, nor yet that, when He died on the cross, the sin of the world would as yet come to an end. Then and there no doubt He laid the basis for taking it away. The only work which could ever take away the sin of the world was the blood-shedding of the Lamb of God. Yet the sin of the world is not yet gone. If sin were taken away out of the world, no wickedness could be known or exist anywhere longer. There would not be an atom of evil left.

When, then, will the sin, that the Lamb died to take away from the world, be clean and for ever banished from it? In the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. It will not vanish away till then. As believers, your sins are undoubtedly forgiven, but this is another thing. Your sins are now blotted out by the precious blood of Jesus if you believe on Him, “whereof the Holy Ghost is also a witness to us” (Heb. 10:15-17). Hence we read: “You now hath he reconciled” (Col. 1:21); but He has not yet reconciled “all things” (ver. 20). He has shed His blood for the purpose, and that blood is beyond doubt a perfectly efficacious sacrifice, whereby all things are surely to be reconciled to God; but they are not reconciled till He comes again. There is still suffering, sorrow, and death; there is corruption and violence, unblushing idolatry, and heartless infidelity; there is still every kind of

human iniquity and rebellion against God going on in the world as much as ever. Yet the work which, as a righteous ground before God, will remove all this evil out of the world, is done; and God has accepted it but not yet applied it to the world, though He is so doing to believers. When the Lord takes the world-kingdom, it will be richly applied and for a long while, but not in absolute and everlasting fulness, till “the new heavens, and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” Then there will be left remaining no more sin nor effect of sin in the world. It will be completely gone. Then will it be proved how true it is that Jesus is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

I am aware that people lay stress upon the fact that John said, “which taketh away,” as if it were then going on; but this is a very ignorant way of using Scripture. For instance, one goes into a druggist’s shop and gets there a bottle of laudanum labelled “Poison.” This does not mean that the poison is working now. If the druggist says it is laudanum which kills a man, he does not mean that it is then doing its work, but simply that, when it is applied to a man, it will kill him. People confound what is called the absolute or ethical present with the actual present. One is sorry to be obliged to use high-sounding words about this matter; but it is difficult to convey what is wanted in simpler language, and it is important that it should be conveyed accurately. Even learned and devoted men — and you know very well that I do not wish at all to question their ability — have sadly mistaken in this matter.

But a man may be a great scholar, and not wise in Scripture. Not a few of the greatest scholars have been rather heterodox. Great learning does not necessarily

give even good sense. Further, a man may have both learning and good sense; and yet not be spiritual. If you had ever such ability and attainments, you would still require the teaching of the Spirit. Assuredly this is what one constantly finds if much used to commentaries and writings upon the Scripture, as some Christians have been in their time. You would find it dull work to pore over their discussions, if you had reason to examine the folios and quartos that have passed through the press; you would prove how very little Biblical learning has to do with the real intelligence of the word of God. Learned as many of the writers of these commentaries were — and some of them were also able men indeed — yet somehow or other, when they took up the Scriptures, they failed to apply Christ as the one key to unlock all. They rarely seem to speak out of the possession of the truth; and this is the only way to understand the Bible. You can never understand it unless you have Christ and Christ's work, and its present result in power for the soul, clearly before you, in order out of this to interpret the word of God, which then to a large extent becomes an explanation in God's own language of what you have already got. You have already life in the Son of God if you are a believer; you have by His blood the forgiveness of your sins; you have by faith entered the family of God as His children, and have been sealed by the Spirit till the day of redemption.

Let me bring the matter home to you. I had great difficulty in finding a few verses of a Paraphrase which we might sing to-night in a certain connection with my subject. Be assured that I do not wish to find fault — the very reverse. But then I could not agree to sing what was not true. I should have liked to have found

something scriptural to celebrate about the Spirit; but I could not. I found a prayer to seal us by His Spirit. But how could one sing that, any more than, when I put my coat upon my back, I could ask a man to put it there? If you are sealed, it is a fact, and it is a fact that abides. It is not an uncertainty. It is not something that requires to be repeated. There is no such thing as being again sealed by the Spirit. It is not a partial blessing, or constantly in need of renewal, just as you have to take food every few hours. This is not the case with the sealing of the Holy Spirit. It is a privilege once given which continues, however important it is that we should not grieve Him but be dependent on His action and be filled with Him. Clearly then he who wrote the Paraphrase referred to was not aware of this; and the consequence is that he was in no little uncertainty when he came to the Spirit's operations. I see in the LXth Paraphrase, and no doubt it is the same all through, "Oh, may Thy Spirit seal our souls." I could not sing this, nor could I ask you to sing it; because, if I believe the Scriptures, He has sealed my soul, and He has sealed yours if you are now children of God in the liberty of Christ. If you are not in liberty, you need to be sealed. It is the sealing of the Spirit that brings, not life but, liberty into the soul. You recollect the apostle's words — "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Now, in a previous verse of the same chapter he says "The letter killeth" (referring to the law), "but the spirit giveth life." Thus, if one take up the Old Testament and abide in the mere letter, no spiritual blessing is gained. If one take, for instance, the various offerings and merely think of a Jew bringing his bullock or sheep, or perhaps a pair of birds, to the altar, what is there in this to quicken the soul? Nothing. The consequence then was

that the Jews who simply brought their birds or beasts to the altar lived and died Jews, and never went to heaven at all. But any of us drawing from these symbols that there is Another who must settle his case with God, that there was to be an unblemished One to take up the cause of the sinner atoningly, and that this sacrifice is none other than Christ's, passes at once from dead offerings to the Lord made sin on the cross. There is the spirit that quickens.

When a man is quickened, he does not always receive liberty. I have known a soul (who, I cannot doubt, being quickened, has gone for thirty or forty years without being sealed at all) to remain still in great bondage of spirit, a lady who passes too much of her time in capricious judgments, too harsh here, too light there; the end of all which is that she finds the word a two-edged sword, which, while it has an edge against other people, has also one against herself. Constantly doubting whether such or such a person is saved, she goes from one thing or person to another, but always comes back to herself, and never yet has seen for her own soul that God rolled everything upon Christ, never yet for her own need been able to rest on Him as the Lamb. The consequence is that she is not what Scripture calls "saved." It is not that she doubts He is the Son of God, but she constantly hesitates about her own interest in Him when it comes to the point. She is like a person who would say, "I am not content with the High Priest confessing the sins of the people. If I could only hear Him mentioning my name and my sins, it would give me true comfort; but I only hear about sins in general, which I cannot believe to be a confession for me." This is not the faith of the gospel really. The word of God's good

news says, “Whosoever,” for He knew a great deal better than to indulge souls in such delusions.

Supposing for a moment, that there was such a thing as naming anybody, do you not know that there may be hundreds of the same name? Thus a person would on this principle be always in doubt whether his own sins were really confessed: so that, if one were to be indulged in a desire so selfish, neither he nor others could ever get solid peace at all. Graciously therefore does God say “Whosoever.” Surely any of you that have had questions about your soul are covered by the words “whosoever believeth.” Again, “If any man thirst.” Just see the blessed ways God has taken to open the door and to bring sinners in. He loves to save. It is the delight of God to reconcile to Himself. It is glory to the name of Jesus when a poor sinner comes and casts himself upon His precious blood. He is the Lamb of God, and the very fact that He is so is the best possible ground for a soul to come now, no matter who he may be or what he may have done.

It is not true that Christ has taken away — still less that he was then taking away — the sins of the world; for if this were done, not a single soul would be sent to hell. Everybody would be saved if all the sins were taken away. If faith were still necessary in order to apply it, the believer would be comparatively uncertain, or in danger of self-righteousness; for all his difference from a lost soul must then lie in what is personal: God’s grace would be the same absolutely for all. But this contradicts Scripture.

The consequence of this mistake is the more serious, because it leads to other and if possible worse mistakes.

In the Roman Mass Book they say “The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world.” Christ, according to their doctrine, has taken away everybody’s sins; but nobody gets to heaven unless, besides that, he is faithful to the church, and does what the priest tells him — unless he obeys not only the commands of God, but also those of the church, availing himself duly of the seven Sacraments. And so there is a hope that, being thus faithful to the church, he may get to heaven at last. Is it not a very poor kind of salvation? Is it God’s?

It is God alone that can save; none but a divine person. The church needs to be saved, and therefore cannot save. The whole notion is radically false, and while opening the door to the delusion that everybody’s sins are gone, it brings everybody’s sins upon them after all, because if after being baptised they sin again, Christ does no good to them, and the whole work has to be done over again. Such is the doctrine of the Council of Trent, yea of East as well as West. Indeed it has so affected other bodies that there is scarcely any Protestant body in Christendom that has not been more or less injured by this dangerous departure from the word of God. This shows the importance of even one letter. The “sin” of the world is right — “sins” would not be true. It is never said that our sins are gone except to the believer. Where it is written that Christ bore our sins in His own body on the tree, it is the believer’s sins that are referred to. There is no such thing as His bearing the sins of every person in the world; but if you come out of the world, if you confess the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, you find your sins are gone. Christ has done the work. God gives you to know by His word and Spirit that you are forgiven. This is the doctrine of Scripture, so

that there is the fullest comfort — without reserve, and without hesitation — in virtue of the mighty work of the Lord Jesus. But the full effect of His earthly work will only be when every trace of sin is gone in the eternal scene of righteousness and glory.

We come now to His heavenly work. What can it be? Many are not aware that Christ has done a great heavenly work. I do not speak of His priesthood, nor even of His advocacy before the Father. He is a Priest to give us sympathy in our suffering, and He is an Advocate to give us restoration when we have sinned. For alas! you know believers may sin, and do sin; and the Lord Jesus is Advocate with the Father; as John says — “If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

But there is another blessed work that John refers to here in the verses we have read, and what is that? “The same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.” Yet the Lord Jesus never baptized with the Holy Ghost till He went to heaven. It is from heaven that He does so, and this is clearly brought before us in the Acts of the Apostles, to which you can now refer. You may see it for yourselves clearly promised for the last time in Acts 1:4, 5, “And being assembled together with [them], commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which [saith he] ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” Do not suppose that this was confined to the apostles, or to those who were Christ’s immediate disciples. The apostles were prominently before His mind, but not exclusively.

Accordingly in Acts 2 we find that, when they were all with one accord in one place, suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a mighty rushing wind, which filled all the house. Just as the wind did then fill the house, so the Holy Ghost came to constitute them God's house. Cloven tongues, like as of fire, sat upon each of them. There was the personal as well as the general presence of the Spirit of God. He did not appear like a dove, but like cloven tongues of fire. He came like a dove on the Lord Jesus; for the Lord Jesus had no sin: not a taint of evil was in the flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was a perfect man, not even knowing sin; and, that this might be, He was conceived of the Holy Ghost. If He had been born in a natural way, He must have had sin; but the power of the Highest counteracted this, so that He should be born of woman, yet "A body hast thou prepared me" without sin. This wonderful truth was set forth in the meal offering, where the flour was mingled with oil, without leaven, which represents the corruption of our nature. But there was no leaven in the meal-offering. Oil, the constant symbol of the Holy Ghost, was mingled with the flour to make the cake, and, when the cake was made, oil was poured upon it. This was admirably fulfilled in our Lord Jesus. First, the Holy Ghost came upon the virgin, and the power of the Highest overshadowed her; and next, when He was about thirty years of age, the Holy Ghost descended upon Him without blood, because He was without sin. And God the Holy Ghost comes down on us.

But see how strikingly our case resembles, and yet is differentiated from, our Lord Jesus Christ. We are of a sinful nature, but born of the Spirit. There is by the word of God the action of the Holy Ghost: we are born of

water and of the Spirit. The Holy Ghost does not come on us until we rest on Christ's redemption. The problem was, How could the Holy Ghost come and dwell in what was unclean? Now the efficacy of the blood of Christ is to make us perfectly clean in the sight of God. This is what redemption does. The precious blood of Christ "cleanseth us," it is said in Scripture, "from all sin." Do you believe it? Do you really bow to what God declares, that "the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin"? We see the reason why the Holy Ghost was never before given to a sinful man. I do not say He never operated on such; on the contrary He did so in every believer since Abel. But He never was given, never sealed a believer, till the blood of Christ left him without spot or stain. There is the Spirit of God quickening the soul when a man is a sinner; and there is the Spirit of God now sealing him, when he, a believer, rests on the work of Christ. So our Lord Jesus told the disciples that they were to be baptized with the Holy Ghost. They were already quickened, being for years true believers, but they were not yet baptized in the Holy Ghost. But now He goes up to heaven to send down the Holy Ghost; and this is most distinctly shown in Acts 2:32, 33, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear."

The Holy Ghost was given to Christ twice — for Himself while He was upon the earth, for us when He went to heaven: and this is the reason why the Holy Ghost never leaves the church, because He is given to the church in virtue of Christ, and not because of our good behaviour.

The Holy Ghost is given to Him, and it is through Him and because of Him that the Holy Ghost always abides. If the Holy Ghost were to leave the church, it would be as good as saying that Christ was no longer worthy of the Holy Ghost abiding. God could not say so; and this is what makes the Holy Ghost so precious. And so the Lord told them in the fourteenth chapter of John, “He shall abide with you for ever” (John 14:16).

To be sure there are people who do not believe this. I do not know whether it is the case now, but some forty years ago it used to be a regular practice for known evangelical men to put forth a little document every year calling for united prayer that the Holy Spirit should be shed forth again on the church — that we should have a fresh effusion of the Spirit of God. Is not this a very serious thing? Suppose that people were to begin to pray at the end of the year that Christ should die again! Everybody would look aghast, thinking it a denial of the faith. But is it less really preposterous, is it not equally unbelieving, to pray for the Holy Ghost to be given again? He is shed, and being shed, He abides for ever.

Do you tell me, that the Spirit is to be shed again in this world’s history? I grant it; but this will be for Israel, and for the Gentiles when Israel believes, as it is beautifully shown in the High-Priest going into the sanctuary and coming out. Perhaps you recollect that the bells which were on the vestments of the High Priest gave forth a sound when he went into the most holy place, and when he came out. The bells ringing when he went in would answer to the gift of the Spirit of God to us, the church, when our Lord went up on high; and the bells ringing when he came out, to the fresh testimony of the Holy Spirit when Israel shall be brought in. But there is no

such doctrine as the Holy Ghost shed repeatedly for the church. When He was sent down, He was given to abide with us for ever. I am aware of all the darkness in the middle ages — of the revived superstition and the fresh and abounding rationalism in the present age; nevertheless, the Holy Ghost abides. Yet I do say that the Holy Ghost abides, because Christ said it, after He obtained eternal redemption, as it was because of this that He went up into heaven itself. It was not a temporary redemption, like that of the Jews, who were taken out of Egypt, but might be carried off to Babylon. It is otherwise with the church of God. The Lord Jesus brought in eternal redemption, and the consequence is that the Holy Ghost comes down and abides for ever.

So far our Lord's case differs, on Whom the Spirit came down like a dove, because there was a perfect absence of evil; no question of the smallest sin or taint, or anything to indicate corruption in our Lord. This could not be said about us, and therefore did the Holy Ghost descend in the form which He assumed for the disciples, "like as of fire." Fire always marks the judgment of God. The Holy Ghost could not have come upon the disciples if there had not been God's judgment dealing with their sin in the work of Christ. But there was more than this. There appeared cloven tongues, because it was to be a question of testimony. Not so in Christ's case; for He is the One testified of. We are called to be witnesses of Him. We know but are not the truth; He only and emphatically is the truth to be witnessed to. Cloven tongues formed a beautiful emblem of the power of the Holy Ghost put forth in making believers witnesses to our Lord Jesus Christ. Cloven tongues — no longer one language as of Canaan, but more, every tongue of every

nation under heaven — point not to Jew only but to Gentile, so that the expressiveness of the symbol seems unmistakable.

Such then is the fact: let us now enter a little into the doctrine. Notice, first, that the Spirit of God, and we are speaking of the gift of the Spirit, is never mentioned until a man has already believed. Always bear this in mind. The new birth makes a man a believer; the gift of the Spirit comes when he is a believer. The gift of the Spirit brings him into liberty — not into life. The truth of Christ brings him life, and the Spirit of God takes His part in quickening; but the Holy Ghost is given to him already a believer; and this seals him in perfect liberty. For this reason you wilt observe that in the earlier chapters of the Epistle to the Romans we have the sinner looking to Christ and His blood, and not one word about the Holy Ghost yet, because the idea is to present Christ, not to distract him with what works within him. The Spirit does work in order that he may look to the true object, but the Holy Ghost is never an object of faith, which Christ is. When a man has received the gospel, when he rests upon the blood of Christ, the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given. This is the first mention of the Holy Ghost in the Epistle to the Romans. We come to no less than the fifth chapter before there is any allusion to the working of the Holy Ghost in the believer; and then we hear of the love of God shed abroad in the believer's heart by the Holy Ghost.

"Perfect love casteth out fear." (1 John 4:18) But it is God's. Whenever we turn upon our own love, or take any satisfaction from it, it is a poor sign of state or faith. Real love always has a high ideal of the object that is

loved, but never of itself. God's love in Jesus is a perfect love, and casteth out fear. There is no perfect love except the love of God in our case, not ours to God, but His to us. His is perfect love, and only so; and this alone casts out fear. I know that He loves me so perfectly that He not only gave His Son to come down and bear my sins on the cross, but that I should be as He is in heaven. There are two ways in which Christ shows perfect love: first, by coming down to bear all my sins and stripes; secondly, by going up to heaven to give me His glory. Meanwhile He sheds on me the Spirit, that God may dwell in me and I in God. Such is the perfect love of God. Christ was carrying out God's mind, God's affections, God's great purposes; and all this is exactly what the Holy Ghost bears witness to. "For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us. Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God, who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." (2 Cor. 1:20-22)

Passing over some most instructive chapters in the Epistle to the Romans we come to the eighth, where we are told — "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." We need not read the next clause, because it ought not to be there; and one may safely venture to predict that, when the new version of the Scriptures comes out, none will find it there. [See now R.V.] "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus; for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." (Rom. 8:1-2) This is the first reason assigned why there is no condemnation — sin and death are no longer a law to the believer, because the Spirit of

life in Christ risen has liberated him. He has a new life; and the Holy Ghost has been given to him. “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” The allusion is to what the Lord did on the day that He rose from the dead. He told Mary Magdalene to go and tell His disciples, “I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.” (John 20:17) This was His message. He put the disciples, as far as could be, in precisely the same relationship with God as Himself. He could give them (not Godhead, but) the place He had as the risen man before God. Up to that time the bearing of sin, and death in rejection and atonement, were always before Him. Now everything evil was behind Him, and glory in heaven before Him. Now He says, this is your position as well as Mine: “I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.” And that message brought the disciples together, “the doors being shut for fear of the Jews,” and the Lord entered the closed doors just as easily as if they had been open. (John 20:19)

You will notice that the first thing He did — after giving them the comforting announcement of peace, peace for them, and peace for others — was to breathe upon them. And what breath was that? His resurrection breath — life in resurrection power — “Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” (John 20:22) It was the resurrection life of Christ breathed into the souls of the disciples. I do not say that it was a thing that could be felt physically, or seen, of course. Such is not the nature of the spiritual life. The wind may be a figure of it, but it is not a material thing palpable in an outward way. Yet it is a reality — a present reality — much more so than the old life, which itself is quite impalpable. The wisest who cry up the

present time are no wiser on this point than the sages of former times. Yet life is not more momentous than wonderful; and how solemn to think that, when it leaves the body, all efforts to restore it fail! You may galvanise a dead body and make the limbs move, but electricity is not life. Even in natural life you come to a barrier that no science can penetrate — no microscope can discern, no tests can analyse; but there it is, an inexplicable secret to man — a thing that shows the finger of God, where all the discoveries of science only bring out more clearly the fact that man cannot solve its enigma.

If such is the case with natural life, how much more so is it with the spiritual — that life that comes from Christ and enjoys Him for ever! With this law the Christian has to do, as the Jew with the ministry of death and condemnation written on stones: “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” (Rom. 8:2) Death, of course, was the end of the first man. The resurrection of Christ is the believer’s power of entrance into the new condition where there is no change, or sin whatever. You may tell me the Christian may sin, and quote passages from Scripture to prove that; but they do not mean that the new life has sinned. It is because a man has not kept the old life in order. The old man is like a wild beast, which you have to keep like a wild beast under lock and key. We are responsible to do so. Nothing can be more shameless than to hear a man who has broken out into sin say, “Oh, it was not I that sinned, it was the weakness of the flesh.” If you live in the Spirit, you are bound to mortify the flesh with its affections and lusts. It is unchristian-like for any man to excuse his wickedness by talking about the flesh. No doubt it is the fact; but he

is bound to keep the flesh under, and there is power in the Holy Ghost given him to deal with the old man.

In Gal. 5:17, correctly translated, we read — “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would.” Our version runs, “So that ye cannot do the things that ye would”; but this is quite wrong. What the word of God, properly rendered, says is good and true, “That ye do not the things that ye would.” The Holy Ghost is given to the believer, and the action of the Spirit is directly contrary to the flesh, as the flesh is contrary to the Spirit. “Lo, I come,” said Christ — who indeed was the only one that could say it unwaveringly — “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God”; but we are responsible, being set apart for the purpose — sanctified unto obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. This does not mean that we are merely to obey and that the blood of Christ repairs our disobedience. The meaning is that we are sanctified to the same kind of obedience as Christ, whose blood gives us confidence that our sins are by grace forgiven.

The allusion in 1 Peter 1:2 is to what took place at mount Sinai, when blood was sprinkled on the people, and they said, “All that the Lord hath said will we do.” But they did not. They were disobedient; and the blood witnessed that they must die the death because of their disobedience. We start with the precious blood of Christ, while at the same time we are called to obey as Christ did; and what comes in to meet our delinquencies is confession of our sins, or the washing of water by the word. This is the meaning of the washing of the disciples’ feet by the Lord Jesus before He went to heaven. It was to show His own here the work He is

gone to heaven to do for them. Peter at first refused to let his feet be washed, and then, when corrected, asked that his whole body should be washed; but he was wrong in both respects. He did not know, if one be already washed with the washing of regeneration, that no more is wanted for the removal of subsequent faults than to have his feet washed. In other words, the particular evil that may be contracted in walking through the world requires to be removed. “He that is washed (bathed) needeth not save to wash his feet.” If at first wholly washed, as every believer is, he needs only partial cleansing, in other words the washing of his feet, when he subsequently does wrong. Peter did not lose the benefit of being born of water and the Spirit when he afterwards sinned grievously. If not a true saint he would have gone and hanged himself, like Judas. Therefore the very thing the Lord prayed for was that his faith should not fail. Judas, in the despair of his heart, went and perished miserably. Peter did not, although he committed a great sin, because the Lord prayed for him, and afterwards indeed took particular notice of him — “Tell the disciples and Peter” — the only one mentioned, and why? Because he was the one that most needed it. How gracious is the Lord! How full of tender mercy! He is the spring, the unfailing Giver of all grace. Once in Him all your sins are gone, and yourself brought nigh as alive to God. This is the true place of every believer. “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled

in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." (Rom. 8:2-4)

You observe two reasons are given why there is no condemnation. The first is, that Christ gives a life which God cannot condemn; whilst the second is, that God has already condemned (not merely the sins, but) the sin that gave them birth. The whole of our evil is already condemned in the cross of Christ — the wondrous Christ of God. These are the two grounds why there is no condemnation. And the effect is that the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us. Not in any Jew, but in every Christian; for every Christian loves God and loves his neighbour, and these are the two great moral aims of the law. How can a Christian not love God, who first loved him? And does not the Christian love his neighbour? Does he not go forth every day of his life to serve not only his neighbour and friend, but even his enemy? This is what the Christian is called to; and this is what every real Christian does, although not so fully as he ought, "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Just so far as a Christian walks in the Spirit is the righteousness of the law fulfilled in him. It is a remarkable fact that the people who were under the law never kept it, and that those who are not under the law are the only people that do keep it, and this because of the delivering power that God has brought in through Christ.

Let me here recall to your notice the constant danger of a soul that has been awakened, to mix up the work of the Spirit with that of Christ. It is always on the look out for fruits. As you are, you had better say nothing about fruits yet. If you seek to find fruits before you enter into

peace with God, you never can find peace. No man ever found peace with God by looking within himself; and God never meant any to find peace save by turning to Christ. Do you not hear Him saying, “Having made peace by the blood of His cross?” This is not within but without you. It is something wrought for you by Christ, and Christ alone: and the quickening of the Spirit is not to furnish ground for peace within you, but to prove that you are nothing but a poor guilty sinner; thus forcing you out of yourself to rest on the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The tendency of the anxious soul is to look within, for confirmatory marks of the Spirit. But so long as he does not rest on the work of Christ, he never can have peace.

For saints there is another danger. When you have peace, beware of separating, as is too often done, the Spirit from Christ. Men say you need the Spirit of God to sanctify you. Rather you need the Spirit of God constantly to direct your eyes toward Christ. There are these two dangers then: one for a man who is just awakened; the other for him who has found peace with God. The saint cannot go in safety unless he has the Spirit of God fixing the eyes of his heart on the Lord Jesus. This is the point the apostle refers to at the close of chap. 3 in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians.

But I would say a few words on a preceding verse “Now the Lord is that spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty”; (2 Cor. 3:17) and I will show you how difficult it is — not in reality, but in appearance — either to understand the Scriptures, or to give them even a right outward form. People often think that if you have “spirit,” or any other word in a verse more than once, it must always bear the same meaning. Here this is not the

case. “The Lord is that spirit.” How should “spirit” be printed? I answer unhesitatingly, with a small “s.” “Now the Lord is that spirit.” The “Spirit” would be downright heterodoxy. Who would tolerate such a notion as that the Lord Jesus is the Holy Ghost? One can understand how in the “Shepherd of Hermas” (a most offensive little treatise, and really heretical, which in the second or third century used to be read in public worship) there occurs a confusion and worse between the Lord Jesus and the Holy Ghost; but this no where is or can be in Scripture.

The fact is, that the meaning of the verse is connected with what was quoted before. The apostle was contrasting the old covenant with the new, and he says, “the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.” Christ, under the letter of the old, quickens; the letter of the old without Christ does not. “Now,” says he, “the Lord is the spirit,” i.e., of the old. The letter cannot quicken, but the spirit does. It is the Lord that is meant by the Passover, Red Sea, Manna, etc., as also by the burnt, meat, peace, and sin offerings; and so one might go through all the letter of the law. “The Lord is the spirit”; and this is the reason why I should print “spirit” with a small letter, though it is not so in my book. It may be different in your Bibles. But if not, you must remember the copyists were not inspired, any more than the printers, translators, or critical editors. The question is the bearing of the truth of God; and I affirm that the doctrine which confounds the Lord Jesus with the Spirit is not true. Is it not impossible, therefore, to print “spirit” in that verse with a capital “S” consistently with truth? For this would identify the second person of the Trinity with the third, which is wholly untrue.

But the moment you come to the next clause, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is,” you must have a capital “S,” because the Holy Ghost is meant. The Lord has gone on high, but the Holy Ghost is sent down below; and He it is who now seals the believer, bringing him into liberty in Christ. Thus what the apostle first lays down as a principle is that the spirit of the old forms of the law always pointed to the Lord Jesus. “The Lord is the spirit.” Then besides this, the Spirit of the Lord is now come down from heaven to anoint the believer, and seal him in virtue of redemption.

Not a few passages might be quoted bearing on the same point. I might go through almost the whole of the epistle with the same result, each having its own special bearing, and all perfectly harmonious; but this is scarce necessary.

What I want is to lay before your souls the truth of God as to this the great Christian privilege. Have you not only Christ for your life, but the consciousness that your body is the temple of God? I know there are many who would think this a most extraordinary thing to claim. Let me tell you that — “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his”; (Rom. 8:9) he does not belong to the Lord as a Christian unless he be sealed. He may be quickened, born of God, and converted. But the proper power, the true distinctive mark, of a Christian is that he is sealed with the Spirit; and the sealing of the Spirit comes in answer to the redemption of Christ Jesus.

Wake up then, wake up, beloved children of God, to your great privileges! Those who are ignorant of the gospel may call you presumptuous. In truth you can never

worship or serve God as you ought, if you do not enjoy your proper privileges. You need to do so in order to be at home with God, to gain confidence in His love, and glorify Him. The spring of all power to perform duty depends on the simplicity with which your soul enters into your relationship with Christ. Even in common life relationship affects, as it should govern, all our actions. The duty of a servant is quite different from that of a master; and a similar rule holds good in all our social relationships. There is a walk, and a worship too, belonging to the children of God, and to none else. You cannot mix men of the world with those that are of God without dishonouring Him. Indeed the effect of such a union is ruin practically to the souls of both; because, as the child of God cannot raise up the worldly to his own level, he must come down to the level more or less of the worldly man; and this is why in many of the liturgies they mingle both in an offensive alliance that suits neither, with language of a wholly inconsistent kind. A Christian is not getting forward with God who tries to please both world and church; if he follows God's way, all will go well with him. We are members of the family of God — heirs of God with Jesus Christ. Even on earth the family life is the highest type of bliss for man. And God has a family, in whose well-being He takes special delight. Suppose a person were to go into a household, and, pretending himself a friend of the children, should put it into their heads that possibly the chief of the house was not their father, you would say, "What a villain he is, to try and spoil all the peace of that family!" And if this would be bad in your families, to play a like part is a great deal worse in God's family. It is as insulting to God as it is injurious to His children; and though people may do what they like with God for a

while, the day is coming when they will have to own their folly and sin.

I beseech you, therefore, to be faithful to the Lord. Let me urge on you, in the name of the Lord Jesus to search and see whether these things are so. If you are not children of God, the door is open, the way is clear, the Saviour is waiting. If you simply come as poor sinners, the Lord will in no wise cast you out. But come as sinners in the sense of your sheer need, in the confidence of His grace. Do not come as if there were a doubt that had to be cleared whether you could succeed or not; and the Saviour will meet and serve you at once. When the Syro-Phoenician woman came, she spoke as a Jew. She cried, “Son of David.” What right had she to say, “Son of David, have mercy on me”? No more right than a Frenchman has to repair to an English consul and ask his assistance; let him go to the French consul. The Son of David was for Jews. When the two blind men so appealed in Matt. 9, had they to wait for an answer of peace, when they confessed their faith? When two more at the end made the same call near Jericho, did the gracious One rebuke, or reply in grace? The woman of Canaan was wrong — somewhat as worldly people when they say, “Our Father, who art in heaven”; for He is not their Father at all, but will judge them by the Lord Jesus. But if a person comes and says, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” will He then say them nay? The Lord would not at first answer the woman’s prayer, because she went on mistaken ground. And when the disciples would have done with the case, ashamed of her crying after them, He had to correct their impatience with His maintenance of God’s order: “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Then she said, “Lord,

help me!” When she dropped to this, the Lord answered her, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread and to cast it to dogs.” The moment she hears it, the truth flashes on her soul that she was not of the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but a dog. She sinks to the lowest place, and says, “Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” She took the place of truth, and got the blessing of grace. The lack of this keeps many souls from obtaining the blessing. They are unconsciously in a false position. They assume to be worshippers when they should not. If they confessed themselves poor sinners needing to be saved, they would find the Saviour at once. If you can and do say, Abba, Father, be assured you have the Holy Ghost; and if not progressing in the Christian race, see and judge what hinders you, and if you are not grieving the Holy Ghost; search the word of God, and follow Christ! Amen.

W. K.

The Actions of the Holy Spirit in the Assembly

1 Corinthians 12

The subject of which the apostle treats in this chapter, as an exposition of the principle (which is continued in the next chapter, where we have the spring of power, and in the one after, where we have the practice) was one most deeply needed at that time by the Corinthian saints, and not at all less now. For there is no greater forgetfulness of any part of the truth of God among Christians, than as to their great need of the Holy Ghost on the one hand, and as to God's great gift of Him on the other. Indeed, it is bound up with all the distinctive blessing of the church. Not that these chapters contain all, not that they exhaust every side of the blessing; for we have here the church more particularly viewed as the scene of God's power, not so much as the object of Christ's affection. For the latter we must look into Ephesians. But here we have the truth of the church (not the individual) viewed as that to which God had given the Spirit of power, of love (which the apostle treats of in 1 Cor. 13), and of the sound mind that should be shown (which we have in 1 Cor. 14).

The Spirit of power was there, but, whatever the energy He works in, the Holy Ghost has in no way set aside responsibility. Man cannot understand this. A divine person — His office is to be here, that He might be in the saints, the dwelling of God, and that they should have therefore an infinite resource; but, at the same time, not so that the might of the almighty Spirit of God

could not be thwarted and hindered, or the testimony which was intended to be borne not be spoiled — not only ruined in its object, but turned to wholly different objects.

This was the state of things which came then before the apostle's mind, as a matter for warning, especially in 1 Cor. 10. Much more is it that which is actually found around us at the present moment, out of which the word of God has called us to emerge. But what we have to remember, beloved brethren, is that every one of us is apt to turn back more than we suspect to what we have left behind. And hence there is a continual source of weakness, even greater than, though not so gross as was found amongst the Corinthian saints. We see plainly in them how little the evil effects of that out of which they had come had disappeared from them. They were no doubt but young in the truth; but length of time does not eradicate evil, being in no way a cure for anything that savours of man. There is only one means, and that is divine power by the truth; for, if it works in us, it works in self-judgment. Divine power invariably — if there is to be deliverance from evil — makes us sensible of it, as well to judge ourselves in the light of God. There is not, nor can ever be practical deliverance, until the Lord, by the power of His own truth brought home by the Spirit, makes us to sit in judgment on ourselves, searching and trying ourselves to the very core.

But as for the Corinthian saints, they were accustomed to a good deal of a different species of evil — having been under the influence and working of Satan, as he wrought powerfully in the heathen. Even before Christ came, there was a vast deal of demoniacal power in the world. We see it surrounding the blessed Lord at every

step. No doubt there were different forms of Satan's power; but one of the worst was that which, usurping the name of God, had given to the Corinthians the idea of religious power. Out of this terribly false condition the Corinthians had come into the church.

And have we no special danger? or if so, what? We have emerged from a state of things, not, it is true, of that gross character, but from what is not less really foreign to the mind of God. We have come out of what is in point of fact a corruption of Christianity, and hence, therefore, we are very apt to bring in thoughts, feelings, and habits, which we do well to bring to the test of the word of God — even the oldest of us. But those who are comparatively young in the way need it more particularly; they have never yet proved duly their convictions; they have accepted a quantity of things, much more than they are aware of, on the evidence of others, rather than by divine teaching for themselves. Along with much that is good there is always the danger of our mingling a little of ourselves in every step of that process, and in particular we ought not to let in or slip back into what we have got out of.

But now for the principle. There are two main ideas among men around us, out of one or other of which we have all come. The one which most extensively prevails is that which I may call the Catholic idea, though perhaps most individuals in this room have known comparatively little of it as experience. Still it is before our eyes, and we are constantly in contact from time to time with persons who suffer from it; and it is well to know how to meet it. The Catholic idea is mainly characterised by this: all blessing, all privilege, is in the church. The grand object of God is the church; there is

the Saviour, life, pardon, every blessing; the only means of having these is to be in and of it; and this, too, as a present thing. For the Catholic idea does not venture far into the future; nor is heaven so much the object of its contemplation as is the earth. The notion is that, all privilege being concentrated in the church, the individual has scarcely any appreciable place. He is merged. He is only a cypher, and all his importance is because he belongs to the church. As to himself, why he is not even allowed to call himself a saint; and, as to being a saint at all, it is entirely a question for the church to settle. Not God, but the church determines whether he is to be a saint or not; and perhaps it is not done till fifty years after he is dead and gone. Now, no doubt all this is very gross ignorance, but it is the form that the Catholic idea has taken. And remember, in speaking of this I am not referring merely to Romanism, but to ancient Christendom, under whatever guise it may present itself.

We have remains, as you know, which show how greatly this theory had taken root not very long after the apostles themselves disappeared from the earth. No doubt there has been development since; but still the great idea was and is much what I have been endeavouring to set before you. This only is essential: all else is matter of detail and may differ. It is found in Romanism as well as in the Eastern Christian bodies; so it was early after the apostles left.

But a new thing began at the Reformation. When the Catholic system had ripened into a monstrous head of corruption, when the results were morally unbearable among men, when the thought of the church had completely ruined or blotted out all right understanding

of God, when, on the one hand, these who belonged to it, individually considered, were so little in the mind of men that it was no question of living faith, provided they belonged to the church; and, on the other hand, when all who were outside the church, no matter how real their faith or love, were considered heretics, and deserving of no better fate than to be punished soundly in this world for the good of their souls; then came up another and counter thought in which the individual only is prominent. The one point here was that a man should read the Bible for himself, that he must believe and be justified for himself, and that as by faith he becomes a child of God for himself, so he should have his conscience left free to serve God for himself. Here all thought of the church was completely lost, and consequently, giving up consideration of the church of God, individuals of this way of reasoning combined and formed churches for themselves. This grew, no doubt, to a far larger extent, and was carried out more fully, than was contemplated when first acted on.

But we find, in fact, that those who justly insisted on the importance of individual faith as the saving principle for the soul, and as that which alone glorified God, began to collect together at last, sometimes in a country to themselves, and then again, when in that country there began to be divergences of opinion among them, they made their own distinct churches. If they did not like the great public church of the country, they chose to split off into different religious societies, all essaying to become churches. One was, as they considered, as good in principle as another, but the best church was that which suited a man’s own mind. This was the individual idea

carried out to its natural results, and such is exactly what we find around us now.

We have the two systems confronting each other in fact. We have the old Catholic notion in those bodies who make everything to be a question of church privilege, who say that it is in the church alone can be found eternal life, or at any rate the hope of it — I might almost say, the chance of it, for it comes to that. The whole system is a question of the church dispensing, the church acting, the church pronouncing, the church teaching what is truth, and really saving: everything is a question of the church. But in the other case the church is lost in the individual. It is the individual who by faith has received the gospel and become a Christian, who consequently uses his own judgment in forming his own church, or joining the church he likes best. Such is the state of things around us.

Let me now ask you, what is the truth of God respecting it all ? And this is where the importance of revealed truth comes in. The Corinthians were in danger of drifting into one or other of these two things, as we shall clearly find in these chapters. It is not, indeed, a very uncommon thing to find a mixture of the two, and this mixture we may trace among the Corinthians. The great thing I want to call your attention to is this: the blessed manner in which the Holy Ghost interferes in order to establish the believer in the truth; and so, without controversy, the soul finds itself able, while kept from what is wrong in each of these principles, to enjoy all that is right in both, as God’s will alone is.

There is no possibility of a thing holding its ground on earth, unless there be something which gives it a moral

claim. There must be a fragment of truth in order to win and keep Christians together. So it is when we look at the Catholic idea, and in what may be called the Protestant one. There is a measure of truth in each; but when we get to God's word, there we have the truth about both, and in this order: — it is not the church first and then the individual, but the individual first and then the church.

So it is introduced to us in this chapter, as it is always in Scripture. Take Matthew 16; What is the question the Lord first puts? "Whom do men say that I am?" One of them gives an answer for himself — an answer which would have done for each, though he who spoke went beyond the rest, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." This was a full confession of Christ, owning Him to be not the true Messiah only, but a divine person in the nearest relation to the Father; and the moment the Lord Jesus hears it, He brings out the thought of the church — "On this rock I will build my church." He had not then begun to build it, and He has not done building it yet.

Again in the Epistle to the Ephesians the same order is most marked. The individual Christian always precedes the body. Take for instance Ephesians 1. It is only in the last verse we see the church; and, if you look through the whole of the Epistle, it is regularly so. The individual is always set in his own place, and this necessarily is a question of faith; for faith is indispensable to the individual, and must be so. He cannot have faith for another. Each must have faith in God for himself. There may be the faith — the common deposit of the truth, which we all own; but still, when we look at faith itself, it

is necessarily individual in the soul. Then comes the question of the church as the body of Christ.

When one believes the gospel, one receives the Spirit, who is not only the seal of salvation, but also unites him to Christ as a member of His body. These are divinely given relationships, whether individual or corporate; but the corporate follows the individual, the power in both being the Holy Ghost after redemption was effected, for the Holy Ghost was not given till Jesus was glorified.

It is just the same thing in the chapter which is before us now.

The apostle opens the matter thus: — “Concerning spiritual [gifts] brethren, I would not have you ignorant.” It will be observed that the word “gifts” is inserted by the translators. Nor is it correct; for the subject, though embracing gifts, goes farther, and takes in what is of far deeper moment as being the source of all, the presence of the Spirit working in the sovereign power of a divine person in the church, and by its members. Perhaps “spirituals” would give the idea if our language could bear it without any addition. If we must, for clearness, supply one, it should be “manifestations” rather then “gifts.”

Next, he tells them, “Ye know that when1 ye were Gentiles” — not “that ye were.” It was nothing new to tell them they were Gentiles, but “when ye were Gentiles, ye were carried away unto those dumb idols even as ye were led.” That is, it was not a mere leading, but rather in those heathen days a carrying away to what they would now look back on with pain, seeing the excessive folly of it as well as its daringness. It was Satan’s direct opposition to the truth of God. They would

learn that the true God is anything but a dumb idol — that He is one who has not only spoken to us by His Son, but who opens the mouths that were once dumb to speak for Jesus Christ the Lord by His Spirit.

Thus the apostle brings in the test of spirits in the confession of Jesus as Lord (ver. 3), “Wherefore I give you to understand that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed.” Here he does not, of course, mean only the precise term “anathema,” or “accursed;” but what he has, as I judge, in his mind, is this: whatever lowers Jesus is an impossibility to the Holy Ghost — a very simple principle, but one which is the only perfect test for all truth in the church of God. The apostle gives it in a double form, a criterion for as well as against. “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” If man ventures without the Spirit of God, he becomes a prey to the evil one who seeks to lower Jesus. The Holy Ghost alone knows what is proper to Jesus. And He does not speak of Him merely as the Son of God. The point where error comes in is in the Son of God becoming a man; for it is the complex person of the Lord Jesus that exposes persons to break down fatally. There are those, no doubt, who deny His divine glory; but there is a far more subtle way in which the Lord Jesus is lowered, and this is where He is owned to be a man, but where the manhood of the Lord is allowed in some way to swamp His glory, and neutralise the confession of His person. Thus, one is soon perplexed, and lets that which puts Him in association with us here below work so as to falsify what He has in common with God Himself. There is but one simple thing which keeps the soul right as to this, and that is, that we do not venture to pry and never dare to discuss it,

fearing to rush in human folly upon such holy ground, and feeling that on such ground as that we are only worshippers. Wherever this is forgotten by the soul, it will invariably be found that God is not with it — that He allows the self-confident one, who of himself ventures to speak of the Lord Jesus, to prove his own folly. It is only by the Holy Ghost that he can know what is revealed about the Lord Jesus. But then we have the double guard: if a man lowers Christ, it is not by the Spirit; and if a man truly says that He is Lord, it is by the Spirit. Here is the chief test for perpetual use in the church of God.

This is the truth about which we ought above all to be jealous. For there is a divine nature in the child of God that is sensitive to what affects Christ, and ought to be so. I cannot conceive anything more destructive to the soul than losing this sensitiveness. The person of Christ is a matter too serious, too fundamental, for any speculation to be allowed, and, in point of fact, the reason of it is this: the Holy Ghost, by whom is all true teaching, is not really with the soul that ventures to teach out of his own resources. He is here for the express purpose of glorifying Christ. Now this is a great thing to be simply settled on. The Holy Spirit of God is here for the purpose. It is not merely for comforting or edifying, though both come in; but the purpose constantly in view is this, — He is here for exalting Christ, and guarding Him from all that lowers Him. It is the aim and work of the Spirit of God as presented in the teaching before us.

Now that the apostle has brought in this great two-edged sword, as it were, to guard the glory of the Lord Jesus, we find him turning to another grave truth in

verse 4, “There are diversities of gifts.” The Corinthians acted as if the only gifts worth talking about, and these above all and evidently grand, were such a manifest display of the divine power as in speaking many tongues without having learned them, or in working miracles. No doubt they did draw attention to the person who had the power so to speak or work; and it is very evident that there was divine power acting in a special way. But the Spirit of God recalls to one of the most characteristic truths attached to His own presence in the church — “There are diversities of gifts.” Whatever does not leave room for every gift that God has given is not the church of God acting as such. Whenever it is an accepted principle or a settled practice, whenever there is a state of things which shuts out the diversities of gifts that God is now giving to the church of God, it is a state which He disowns. It is contrary to the nature and aim of the church of God. Nor do I mean an opening for their exercise here or there in outposts, or in less important and comparatively private ways, but on the greatest occasions, the coming together of all saints as God’s assembly (ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ) whether for the Lord’s Supper or at other times. So the Lord ordained as is shown by the apostle in all the context where, correcting disorders, he maintains this intact.

There are diversities of gifts, “but the same Spirit,” because although these gifts differ immensely in their character, yet they all come from the same source. God has to do with one as truly as another. There is an immense difference between the lesser and the greater gifts, but “the same Spirit;” and if I would respect the Spirit of God, I should respect the least gift that comes from Him. Then there is another thing which the

Corinthians had forgotten (verse 5), “And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.” One cannot have a gift without being a servant; that is, one is not his own master in the use of the gift, but a servant of the Lord Jesus. This the Corinthians had forgotten. They were acting independently. Even the Holy Ghost Himself has deigned to take the place of a servant, and, having come down to that place, He lifts no one above it. This is the next great truth presented to us — not only diversities of gifts and the same Spirit, but differences of administrations, that is to say, of services, yet the same Lord. And, lastly, there were the results produced by these powers which wrought in subjection to the glory of the Lord Jesus. For if there were these differences or “diversities of operations” as they are called (verse 6), “it is the same God that worketh all in all.” What an immense fact in a world of vain show!

If this was rather the general statement of divine power in the church of God, we come in the next place to its working in each individual. The apostle has been showing the common principle. There was the same Spirit, by whom all gifts were distributed, the same Lord, and the same God; but now he comes to the particular forms of the gift (verse 7): “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.” It was not to display the individual himself, but for others’ benefit. For these gifts to effect common good is the grand aim of all these workings of the Spirit of God in the church.

Then (verse 8) we have “For to one is given by the Spirit [not miracles, but] the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge.” Note that he carefully adds “by the same Spirit,” because knowledge has a considerably

lower character than wisdom, but at the same time the "knowledge" that he owns here is as truly by the Holy Ghost as the "wisdom." What is this word "wisdom" as compared with the word "knowledge?" To gather truth by serious study of God's word is far from being wrong. Indeed it is of the Holy Spirit; and the result is "knowledge," and the utterance of it He gives is "the word of knowledge." So Timothy was called to give himself wholly up to it. In fact, what is gathered thus is most justly to be considered the "word of knowledge," and this no doubt has its value; as everything has that God gives by the Holy Ghost to the church of God. What a person gleans, spiritually labouring in the field of the word of God, has its place, is meant for all, and is refreshing to the saints of God. But it is not exactly the same as the "word of wisdom;" for the word "wisdom" indicates that the soul is occupied not merely with scripture, but with Him who gave it that one might know Himself; where the soul, furnished by the word of God, knows what it is to gather God's own mind; not merely to have it in details, as given here and there in scripture, but by a deeper appreciation of His word, to enter into that acquaintance with Him that is found not so much in studying texts, as from communion with His own nature, ways, character, and above all with Christ Himself. He was found, I need not say, always "the wisdom of God." Christ is never called the "knowledge of God," nor could He be, but the "wisdom of God." It is rather, I repeat, to be drinking not merely from the stream, but at the spring of all in God Himself. It is thence that the "word of wisdom" is drawn, following the course of the river up.

Now you will have noticed that the apostle does not commence with what was so evidently striking. He begins, on the contrary, with that which the Corinthians had very little love for, what they had evidently neglected and set aside in seeking after those mighty displays that occupied their active minds. The apostle takes them first to what edifies: “To one is given the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge.” He then passes on to the gift of “faith,” namely, that power which enables the soul to break through difficulties. This is the faith that is referred to here. You must remember the gift of faith does not mean the act of believing the truth, which, of course, is indispensable to all saints.

Then we come to what was sensible to everybody or palpable even to an unbeliever. “To another the gift of healing by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits.” The latter means not discerning whether or not people were Christians, but discerning whether the spirit by which they spoke was of God or of Satan. In short, it was special power in the application of the preliminary criterion given in the third verse, which we have already noticed.

Then we have (ver. 10 to 12), “To another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.” Here we have the fundamental principle that I wish to assert tonight with all plainness of speech; and hence we perceive how the divinely taught may take in whatever is true of the two ideas that we have seen at work, give

its just place to each, and combine them both, instead of setting them at war one with another.

Anything that really weakens faith would not be of God. Whatever would intercept the soul, whatever dared to come between it and the object of faith, could not be of God; and hence, therefore, the word of preaching that God employs for our conversion has exactly this for its object, viz., to put the individual before God — to present Christ to him, to meet his wants and his misery, and his distance from God. There, consequently, it is entirely a question of faith. By faith it is that a man is justified; by faith he becomes a child of God. All the great individual blessings turn on faith in Christ that a man has for himself, given to him by the Holy Ghost through the word of God. It is through Christ (I need not say) brought and revealed to his soul that this faith is produced.

But there is more than this to see. When he is a believer, what follows? When he submits to the testimony of God, when he has received the word of truth, when he has given to him the Holy Ghost, what is the effect? He is brought into the unity of the body of Christ. It is not simply that he has got the Holy Ghost, giving him the joy of the truth he has received, and withal power and liberty before God; but, besides, the Spirit gives union with all those here on earth who belong to God, who are set free for God and to God.

Here then is exactly how we find the combination of the two principles entirely dislocated by man. He has divorced what should be always bound together. If you look only at man, there can be no doubt that the individual (or, as we may say, the Protestant) principle of

faith is an incomparably safer one than the Catholic one, which makes the church all. But, beloved friends, we are not looking at things simply with regard to man, but also as to God; and we are bound to do so, and the Holy Ghost is here for the purpose of taking care of the glory of God, which is done by making Christ the object. He only is the object of all the purposes of God, and the consequence is, that until we enter into God's purposes there never can be the sure or large enjoyment of the truth.

For when we have the Spirit of God, as He now is given to the believer, it is not only individually; but he is baptised into, or made to belong to, the one body. He is "one spirit with the Lord." He is, consequently, one with all that are the Lord's. This, then, brings us face to face with the further truth that the Holy Ghost does not merely imprint unity upon the saints, and then leave them, but is here to make good all the objects of the glory of God. It is of very great moment that the children of God should look at the thing personally. I am even afraid — and particularly so where people trust creeds instead of scripture — that the simplicity and the force of the simple truth that the Holy Ghost is a divine person is but little understood and little believed. Such is the case now, I believe, among those who are commonly called "Evangelicals," whether they are Dissenters or Churchmen. Faith in the Holy Ghost as a divine person being feebly entertained, you will find that they generally talk about the Holy Ghost as an "influence." It is not that they deny the existence of the Spirit of God, but they do not see the all-importance of His being a divine person; and, further than that, a divine person who is here working in God's saints and in God's

assembly, sovereignly or as He will, to glorify the Lord Jesus.

Now here precisely we have the truth that the Corinthians too so little appreciated, and therefore the apostle brings it out in this distinct manner. “All these,” not “some of them,” not those only which made themselves so conspicuous, but “all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that body being many are one body: so also is [not the church only, but] Christ.” The apostle is no doubt looking at the church, but he looks at it with the Head, as inseparably united together. He does not so speak to the Ephesians. They did not require it to be so impressed upon them as the Corinthians. Impossible to have been so loose as the Corinthians were, if they had remembered that the whole being, head and body, was all one Christ. They looked upon themselves as invested with power, and this was the whole affair practically. But the apostle would show them that these powers are but a small part, and an inferior part, of a vast system of divine working in the church on earth. It is a body one with Christ, and even called so, of which each and all of us are living members. “So also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”

Then we have (ver. 14), “For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not of the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?” There plainly we have discontent with what the Lord had given. And was there never greater reason

for this to be looked at than now? Whenever a soul is found to be using the gift that is given to it, there will always be blessing; but if, on the contrary, the one with a humble gift, such as would be represented by “the foot,” should covet what he has not got, his own proper work is lost by ignoring his own place in the body. The whole thought therefore is dishonouring to God. So again (ver. 16), “If the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?” It may run through the members, the highest as well as the lowest.

In the 17th verse he puts it thus, “If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?” The blessedness of the body is in each member doing its own function; because it is not merely my ear that hears, but I that hear, nor is it only my eye that sees, but rather I who see. It is the man. And this it is which gives, therefore, such a sense of unity and is so real a means of blessing to every member, the least just as much as the greatest. They all contribute; and indeed there would be a most sensible loss, were the least member to fail in doing its part. This is what the Corinthians had seriously lost sight of; but we are in just the same danger as they were, and indeed we are more particularly in danger, because, having come out of systems where there was only room for the priest or the minister, we naturally tend to it. There is nothing that people sooner slip into than this kind of isolation and individuality; because for the most part they have come from where individuality was strong, and the place of the church was unknown or swamped. For not more truly does the “church” principle destroy the “individual” one, than the

“individual” principle does the “church” one, if each stands alone.

The blessedness of the truth is that we have both — the individual blessing first clear, and then the corporate one, and both, too, made good by the Spirit of God. If the Spirit of God brings my soul to know Christ, to rest on Him, and rejoice in Him before God, I cannot have that without looking after others who have the same blessing. This is the way in which God brings the two principles together and conciliates them round the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. For it is not merely that I have Him as a Saviour; I have Him also as the Head of the body, as we are told here. “So also is Christ.” What an ennobling yet truly humbling standard for our practice, that all we are is a representation of Christ! I do not mean individually alone, but when we come together in the assembly, for this is the public way of showing the church. How jealous ought we to be, therefore, that every meeting of the assembly should present Christ in truth! If we belong to God’s church, what matter about any other church? His is the only church worth contending for; if we are Christians, we are of it. All we need to see to is that we walk, and meet, and worship accordingly.

This, then, is the first violation of the thought of unity, viz., discontent with the place the Lord has given us, the desire for something greater, something more prominent than that which is ours. “But now,” says the apostle, “hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him.” How establishing this is to the soul! This is what, beloved brethren, we all want to be more distinct about. Perhaps there are persons in this room who have come in merely believing that here we

are enjoying things more simply and with more purity. I believe it; but that does not give you the true measure, nor explain why we have left what man has done in self-will. It is the fact that we have to do with God in the matter, and that God has to do with us; that we meet because and as it is the will of God. Surely God is still carrying on that building, His holy temple; surely He is still carrying on the work of the Holy Spirit according to the figure that is spoken of here — the body of Christ. Whatever may be the difficulties, or disorder, or confusion, it abides, and of that body are we. We have come to that which expresses it, and it is as members of Christ we meet as we do. Each meeting of the faithful that we have our part in is a witness to the one body, though we frankly own the ruin-state in which the church is here below; even the humblest soul that is accepted in the name of the Lord Jesus, as made by the Holy Ghost a member of Christ's body, has just as real a place in it as any other. Not merely so are the prominent members, but no less are those described according to the apostle's figure here as the "uncomely" ones (ver. 23). It is of practical moment that we should accept unreservedly, the truth of God respecting this. So that, supposing there are real Christians that cause trouble or difficulty, it is the teaching of the Spirit of God that we should heartily accept these. What sort of a mother would it be that would find fault and become impatient with one of her children which had anything the matter with it? A true mother would anxiously care for that child more than any of the others, because it would most need her love. May I not then say that it is exactly thus the Lord really calls us to be? For what is a spiritual mind, but a mind in possession of affections and of a judgment according to God, so that we shall be found

seeking just the same things as Christ — not in the least wishing to get rid of a trial or difficulty or anything of the kind, but bearing it, not only in patience, but with love exercised by it.

Let us take up briefly the other form in which the working of the Spirit of God is apt to be set aside (ver. 21). “The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor, again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you.” Here we have the exact counterpart to what we have been looking at. It is not the inferior part that wants to be something greater, but the superior part that disdains the lesser one. These things, brethren, ought not so to be. But as they were then and are now, so we do well to lay this instructive warning to heart. The very nature of the body rises up to rebuke the greater gift which would look down or hinder the less. Let us be thankful to the grace which has given us any place; let us discharge earnestly the functions God has given us in the body of Christ; but let us prize and make the most of every other member, and not least those who have a place wholly different from our own. Disdain be as far from us as discontent.

Here we have the two great hindrances that are too often at work. In both cases we see clearly flesh and not the Spirit of God; for the Spirit of God, as He works in all, so He takes up each and gives each his place, and this because it is God that has put them there. Consequently, whenever the Spirit of God works thus in souls, there should be the shrinking from anything that would weaken or frustrate the will of God: especially if love also is drawn out towards each member of the body of Christ, because it is a member. However we need not enter into that further now.

You will note that in the 21st verse the apostle is more peremptory than in the 15th. We have in the former, “The eye cannot say unto the hand,” whereas in the latter it is “If the foot should say.” The one is the danger of the strong or greater gift, the other of the weak or less; and the former is of the two the most offensive to the Lord.

In ver. 21 the apostle takes in the two greatest extremes of all. “Neither again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.” He is looking here, of course, simply at the body, and bringing out the moral force of the comparison, which is, that the highest gift cannot treat the lowest as if he were needless to him. And, indeed, it is so where grace works; for I am persuaded that you will find that the greater the gift (where there is spirituality as well as gift), there will be the more hearty desire for the working of the least gift that God has given for the good of the church. There will be no such thought as that, because one person has a superior gift, all others are to hold their peace while he is present. The spring of blessedness in the assembly is God Himself, and not any particular member of the body, though he may be by grace a very important channel of working for the good of the assembly. The great point is the sense that God it is who works in the church; and God may, even in the presence of the very greatest, it might be even of the apostle himself, be pleased to use, in a true way to edification, a very simple and lowly member of the body of Christ.

The main thing is that neither the lesser members are to desire a greater place than they have, nor the greatest ones in any way to act as if they could do without the least. They are all precious in the assembly of God. “Nay,

much more" (and this brings in what I referred to), "those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary." It is not that they have their place only, but "they are necessary." They may be trying enough by times, and too plainly show the feebleness of those who have not the power to rise above the circumstances and things around, but still "they are necessary." "And" (ver. 23) "those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need." Take for instance the face. Care of that is not wanted, for it is of itself a comely part. But we take more care naturally of that part which has not the same comeliness, as for instance the foot. So here we find the divine aim: "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." See to it then that there be no setting aside of what God has given for the good of the church, whether it be the lesser or the greater ones opposing each other. If so, the same result, in either case, is produced. It is man thwarting the government of God, nay, His richest grace in the church: would he even make the Spirit appear a party to the dishonour of the Lord? May we be kept and guided in the path of Christ!

The apostle goes on (ver. 26), "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." And then, in the next verse, he brings in a statement well worthy of our mature consideration, "Ye are the body of Christ." Not, of course, that they were independent of any others throughout the world; but still they were the expression

of Christ in that particular place. Strictly speaking, it is neither “a” body as if there was more than one, nor “the” body as if they alone completed it, but “Christ’s body.” They had the privileges and the responsibility attached to it. They were His body there. If you went to another place, you would find not another body but still the same. Looking at them individually, we see that “they are members in particular.”

Each member is a member of Christ, not of a, but of the church, His body. In fact, there is no such thing in scripture as a member of a church. Scripture repudiates such language, which proceeds from the “individual” idea that we have been looking at. There everything is individualised, even the church itself, as well as every person that belongs to it. It is all on a false foundation, not for our relations as Christians, but for those of the church.

The truth is that the Holy Ghost, being a divine person — equally, therefore, acting in all the assemblies throughout the world — necessarily makes all one; and this is the reason why there was no such thing as “one body” until the Holy Ghost came down. In this way it is not faith that unites to Christ. I quite admit that, unless there is faith, a man will never get to heaven, and therefore nothing is more important. This was true before the church existed at all; but now with it something more is true. A divine person is come down, who never took flesh like the Lord Jesus, and never therefore was pleased, so to speak, to unfold His glory in any method so circumscribed as having a body prepared to be incorporated with His divine nature, i.e., to be Himself a man while yet God. But now in fact the Holy Ghost, never having been pleased so to take a body or

become incarnate, takes up all those who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and brings them into unity. This is the true account of the church, and no other; and the consequence is therefore that, no matter where it may be, it is always the “body of Christ.” It is so wherever one finds saints gathered to Christ’s name. Wherever they are met in His name, there the Holy Ghost is left free to work for Christ’s glory. Alas! how many true saints are scattered in sects, not so met. The state of things around us is that the two things are not found together. There are “members in particular,” but not holding to Him as the Head, or gathered on the ground of “the body of Christ.” I speak of the fact, not of intelligence. There are many real Christians, no doubt, but they are not found simply on that footing. I speak now of individuals scattered up and down among the denominations. They are Christ’s members; but could one say of them denominationally that they are met as “the body of Christ”?

Now, our wisdom is to own and act on this truth as on every other known to us. God has shown us the failure and the ruin of the church, and that whatever does not uphold the principle of the body of Christ will always be wrong. If I think only of the ruin of the church, there will be no confidence, nor a happy going forward according to the mind of God: the fact of the ruin will be used as an excuse for doing nothing. But, where we believe that God has His church, although it is at the present time in a state of confusion, we ought, if members of it, to grieve over it, and humble our souls about it; but we must see that we be not acting inconsistently ourselves. If there are ever so few meeting together who own this truth, these the Spirit of God will own. The grand

principle of it is true now as it ever was, because the Spirit of God is as truly here now as He was then. Say I this to encourage assumption? God forbid! for I should not myself meet with any who would arrogantly claim to be the church of God, any more than with such as meet on any other ground than that. Let us cleave to the truth, and this practically, without setting up to be more or other than we really are, not daring to meet in any other way or name but His, but owning the present ruin-state. The only sound and sacred principle to meet on is the one body, and this the body of Christ.

We are next told (ver. 28) “God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.” Observe, it is the same design as before — putting down to the lowest place that which the Corinthians had set first. “First apostles,” and last of all are these “diversities of tongues.” None of the brethren, however, possessed all the gifts, as we find in the 29th and 30th verses: “Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?” Further, they are set in the church, not in a church; and it is the church on earth, not in heaven. It is real living unity in practice. Nationalism or Voluntaryism are therefore excluded no less than Romanism. They all deny the one body in principle and in practice.

The chapter closes with an exhortation to “covet earnestly the best gifts;” that is, those that were for edification, though they had less of display than of power and blessing for the assembly.

1 Corinthians 14:20-40

Before taking up the portion just read, I may add a few words as connecting the previous part of this chapter and the chapter before with what we have already had. I showed, in 1 Cor 12, that the great principle is laid down, not merely of gifts, but of what is called “spirituals” — the word “spiritual” being much more than a question of spiritual “gifts.” What appertains to the Spirit is the point. Now the most important of all is this — not so much these gifts, in which is displayed His power in various forms, but, above all, the presence of God; the presence of God now made good in this especial form of it, that the Holy Spirit is here to act sovereignly in the assembly.

This, therefore, is a deeper question, and of greater moment than any display of particular gifts; and we must not forget that it is included in the doctrine of 1 Cor 12. It shows, no doubt, that there are various forms in which He works. But who is it that works? It is God; and it is not only in a general way in which He may be said to do everything, but the solemn truth that is brought before us, and which we must each value according to the measure of our appreciation of divine things, is this — God present in a new and intimate way, as He never was before, nor could be apart from the accomplishment of redemption. It immensely clears the subject where the soul enters into this.

We know very well that at all times in the history of the world God intervened. Never did He fail to leave Himself a witness of His power and goodness. But it is another thing to have Himself so present as to give character to the place where He has been pleased to come and make

it His dwelling. Granted that it is no question now of a visible sign. In Israel it was; and they being dull, and its being according to the character of His general dealings, Jehovah there gave a palpable proof of His presence. There was the cloud that betokened it. This gave the certainty, therefore, to an Israelite that God dwelt there in a way He had never done before. If they were redeemed out of Egypt, they had God Himself thus taking His abode in the midst of His people. But then this was only a sign; and it was a sign of God dwelling in the darkness too, for such was the nature of it — of a God who could not be approached too near, of a God who was purposely bringing out the sinfulness of the people that stood in this comparative nearness to Him. Still there was amongst them sin, and no offering as yet which could put it away for ever.

Now, on the contrary, the basis of the presence or dwelling of God with us is the glorious fact that sin is judged in the cross, and that God accordingly can be present not merely judicially, nor merely with a sign of His glory, but in the reality of His grace; not closing as yet the place of responsibility of course, nor taking us out of the path of faith, but strengthening us in it. Accordingly the grand point throughout all these chapters is this: whatever consists not with the presence of a God of grace who is Himself in the midst of His people — actually there, whatever is not suited to Him is unsuited to them. It is not a question merely of the people being Christians — which is all taken for granted — but of fidelity, care, dependence on God in the use of the means that He gives us to glorify the Lord Jesus by the Spirit in His assembly.

God is here in our midst: not merely dwelling in each, which is perfectly true, but God making us, when gathered together, His dwelling. This principle is laid down, not merely in 1 Cor. 12, but in 1 Cor. 3, and supposed throughout the Epistle. We must remember that it is a presence here, not merely one by-and-bye, but here on earth. At that time they had God acting according to the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ over Satan; so that there were healings, and miraculous powers, the fruit of complete victory over what even the judgment of God had brought into the world. But besides that, there was what is of permanent value for the testimony of God here below; as, for instance, grace edifying the members of the body of Christ by teachers and the like — the word of wisdom, and of knowledge, etc. On this I need not dwell, but simply recall the two great facts: a dwelling of God on the earth; and, secondly, that dwelling, while really good and true in each particular spot, as really one wherever it may be found. That is, there is a stamp of unity about it, which is bound up with the fact that the Holy Ghost is there, who by His presence is incapable of imprinting anything else than unity. Who does not see one Spirit emphatically brought before us in the chapter?

Now I press this, because there is not a single religious system on the face of the earth which has not in some way let slip that unity — even those who boast most of it. Take, for instance, the Church of Rome. After all there is a vast deal, even in Rome, of what you may call independency, as admitting not only of its separate parishes and distinct dioceses, etc., but of totally distinct orders of priesthood. The only thing that has the appearance of unity is that there is one governor over

all. They and others talk about unity of doctrine, discipline, and the like. But they do not see how utterly short this is of the “one body.” For there might be the same kind of doctrine and discipline in half-a-dozen bodies, and no unity whatever; as, for instance, in the Methodist bodies, or in the Presbyterian ones, which are apart from one another.

But what a different thing is unity in the mind of God — how wholly distinct the oneness of the church according to scripture! For there we do not see “One Spirit” and many bodies, even if they had a similar polity, but One Spirit and one body. And what a blessed thing to know, beloved friends, that this unity is ours, and that it is ours not in an exclusive but in an inclusive sense — that the unity of which we remind one another, as to which we need continually to rebuke our narrow hearts, is that which we maintain for all that are His! It is not a strange place that we wish to compel the saints into, it is not something which we crave as an object near to our hearts in a selfish way, and therefore cry it up; but our one motive is that — it is the truth, this unity of the Spirit according to the will of God. It is a relationship, and this in grace, which God has established by the presence of His Spirit for all that are His on earth, the great effort of the devil being to hinder its manifestation, to destroy the sense of it, and, consequently, all just action upon it in the minds and ways of God’s saints. For I press it, that it is not merely a question of the world coming in, but the more solemn thought that God’s saints have lost even the idea of this unity. Consequently, when most look at the various churches that are existing around them, it is with a feeling of complacency, not of shame and sorrow for the

Lord's injured name. But even if they grieve, let them rise and do the will of the Lord themselves without waiting for others; especially as to obey is better than sacrifice, and example gives the more force to precept. Why should they go on with what is unscriptural? Who asks this at their hands? Certainly not the Lord.

The doctrine of 1 Cor 12 is that "God has set some in the church, first apostles," etc. (verse 28) That is, the Spirit of God blots out all the efforts of man to arrange matters so as to avoid difficulties, and allow what he calls rights to be maintained, and best secured, as he thinks, against collision. Men have got the notion that there is no truth, but only "views" as to divine things; so that it is impossible, where souls come freely together, that there should not be difficulty and danger. Granted; we all admit that. If we have the idea that, coming and finding ourselves upon the ground of God's truth about the church, we shall not find difficulties, and avoid all collision, we have certainly deceived ourselves. And, beloved friends, it is far better that we should be convinced of this from the beginning, and that we should remember that God never guaranteed His assembly that there should not be trials thus to prove us. On the contrary, it is there I look for them, and they are sure to be found; but then is that all? Is the church merely a number of godly persons who come together and who seek grace to bear with one another? Nay, it is God's dwelling-place; and is not God there? He is verily, and displaying Himself, not by a cloud, as in the days of old, but by the Holy Ghost — as it is said, "The habitation of God through the Spirit." The Holy Ghost has the same place now to us, as the cloud of glory had for Israel; and what was then only a visible though glorious sign is now

a divine person in power. For if there be any person in the Godhead to whom it belongs to act in power, it is the Holy Ghost. Whatever may be the counsels of the Father, and whatever may be the work that the Son has done to give effect to those counsels, the Holy Ghost is always the One that brings them out; and the Holy Ghost now has taken this very place. There is the secret of the unity. Who is it that is in the church, and what makes it to be the church of God? Not I say, godly men merely, but in fact the Holy Ghost's presence. It is therefore a question of whether we really do believe in it, and whether we look for it. If we do, the consequence will be that our faith will be tried and put to the proof; but then we shall find that faith, however tried, is never disappointed. If we have brought in any unbelief of our own, any thoughts natural to ourselves, any expectations of our own, they, no doubt, will be disappointed; but this will be a blessing. It is good for us to be corrected of the Lord; and He has brought us where He can deal with us as One present with us, and acting for His own glory.

And as this is what 1 Cor 12 sets before us, so, following it up, the apostle reminds the Corinthians that there was one thing even better than gifts. This was love. Hence, therefore, the place of 1 Cor 13. Looking at God's nature, no doubt He is Light, but what is the energy of that nature? It is love. It is this which actively comes to us from God and blesses us. As He has taken His place in the church, it is no question of His law for a people in the flesh who could not draw near, because God Himself is there. It is not put simply in the form of grace. Love is the energy of the divine nature, as grace its special way towards the evil with which it deals, and which it rises above. Thus love may be where there is no question of

what it deals with, being the spring of what expresses the divine nature in its delight and activity in good. This is developed in the most blessed manner in 1 Cor 13. It is what Christ showed us to be in God; it is what the Spirit would now exercise in us.

It is impossible for the assembly of God to move healthfully or to enjoy happily the truth, unless the effect of truth is to free us from what hinders love — to judge all the roots of that which would impede the exercise of this divine principle. Hence, therefore, the apostle insists upon it that, whatever might be the value of prophecy, or knowledge, or any other gift, they all sooner or later depart. They are suited only to an imperfect condition, after all found necessarily here below; but love is not so. Like Him who is its source, it abides and changes not. Nevertheless the blessed fact is that love is also a present thing, and never more truly needed than now, as a holy spring of activity for the saint, as such, or in the church. This the apostle shows us in the last verse of the chapter — “Now abideth faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

In coming to 1 Cor 14, then, we have not the principle (that we have in 1 Cor. 12) nor the spring of power as in 1 Cor. 13, but the practice, the application, of the great truth. It is true — and I make the remark because I have seen it objected to not very long ago — that we do not hear very much about gifts in 1 Cor. 14. The reason is because God supposes that we have read 1 Cor 12. He does not write the word to save people trouble, nor is it written, as men preach, in texts; by which the scriptures are divorced, and their strength in connection destroyed. Not so; God has written His word to be

prized, to be a matter for waiting on the Lord, that we may enter in and fully enjoy it, though it may not be understood all at once. How wisely it is so! I thank God that His word is so written that there never was a soul since the world began that could take it up and fathom it — even the apostles and prophets themselves. I thank God that His word does call us to take the place of learners. The more God gives us to know, the more He makes us feel how much there is yet to learn, and so we are kept, as He would have us, in the attitude of waiting. No doubt this does not suit the world. It suits much better to talk as if all was understood, while, on the contrary, it will be found how little is actually known.

The point here is this, that 1 Cor 14 is an integral part of the great argument which is begun in 1 Cor. 12; and 1 Cor. 13 is not, as men suppose, a mere digression on love, but a most necessary element of all. For, whatever may be the place of love individually, how much more is it necessary when we are brought into the place of such nearness, of such scope for affection, of such need of patience, of such call for faith!

No doubt our coming together as God’s church supposes our redemption. It is not a question of some peculiar gift or doctrine, but of God’s presence who redeemed us — that He might enjoy with us, and we with Him, whatever He has given us. This is the church of God. Accordingly, then, it is the place where love has its full exercise; and I do not hesitate to say that there could not be such a sphere for love as that which is given us now. We shall have it in heaven in another way, and in a fulness without alloy suitable for heaven. There, of course, all will be positive perfection and enjoyment; but here, in a place of difficulty, of sorrow, of trial, in a place where we

have constantly to walk superior to circumstances, is a sphere where love can grow, and its effects may flourish.

In 1 Cor 14 the gifts, of which the apostle had been speaking in 1 Cor 12, are supposed. To argue as unbelief does, as if there were nothing in 1 Cor. 14 of the same nature as in 1 Cor. 12 is mere folly. But, coming to the point now, there is one thing I would desire to explain before mentioning the general argument of the apostle. In the beginning of the chapter he contrasts prophesying with tongues at great length, speaking of the former in these terms (ver. 3), “He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.” Now, there is many a person that understands this to mean that whoever speaks to exhortation and comfort prophesies. This is to mistake him. You could not invert the sentence and still hold the truth. What the apostle means is this: the man that only speaks in a tongue does not edify, nor does he exhort nor comfort; the man that prophesies does. The truth is, that prophesying is the highest character of divine communication through man. It is not a question of opening futurity, but of bringing God and the soul together. An instance of it we may see in the case of the woman of Samaria. What Christ said to her evidently brought God Himself home to her conscience, and she at once awoke to the conviction that He who spoke was a prophet. Prophecy is therefore the most intimate and direct communication of God in dealing with the soul, giving a person the certainty that the mind of God is being expressed. Of course the man that prophesies does edify; but there are many other forms of ministration to the soul. There is comfort and exhortation in teaching; and again, in preaching the

gospel there might be great comfort to the soul; but still these things are distinct from prophesying.

Now the apostle singles out (I make this remark for the purpose of a little help to the understanding of the general scope of the chapter) two gifts, one of which was slighted, the other overvalued, by the Corinthians. They slighted prophesying, because they were not in the least degree exercised about the enjoyment of God. They valued signs and tongues; and the apostle has given them various severe blows, from the beginning to the end of the epistle, as to their low condition in this very particular. In short, they were walking as men. They enjoyed intellectual exercise, lively speculations, sparkling flow of eloquence. All these things had charms for the Corinthian saints. I do not mean that it was not about scripture. Of course it may have been; but what they did not enjoy was God dealing with their souls. And the reason is plain. They were in an unbroken state. They were some of them getting litigious, others making light of heathen temples and sacrifices; there was disorder in worship, foundation-doctrine questioned, some of them (as we know) not even moral, gross sin being very slightly judged.

Well, as we saw, the apostle confronts these two gifts, prophesying and tongues, chiefly, because they are the antipodes, as it were, of one another — speaking in a tongue being one of the lowest forms in which God's Spirit wrought, as prophesying is the highest. He censures them for their continually speaking with tongues in the assembly of God, while there was no real value felt for prophesying. How came this? They had started upon a false idea. Their notion being that the church was the place for the display of divine power, and

speaking with tongues being one of the most striking and conspicuous proofs of God's power, it was, they thought, the most fitting display for the church of God. Not so, says the apostle, who therefore brings in, as a means to help him in what follows, the bearing of love. There is nothing so characteristic of God amongst His own as love. For we are not here speaking of love going out towards the rebellious, as for instance the gospel used in winning souls. It is remarkable, the gospel never occurs in this chapter, most precious as it is in its own place. In the Epistle to the Ephesians the evangelist is an essential feature; and there accordingly the Lord puts him forward in a most important way, not merely as connected with souls but with the church. This ought not to be forgotten, the evangelist being one of those who are given "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). Here he disappears, because it is not the witness of love to the church, still less to the world but the presence of God in the church before the world that is the point in our Epistle.

The Corinthian idea was that whatever displayed power in them before the world was the thing for the church. Not at all, says the apostle, and for this reason there is no love in it; and, consequently, as he shows here (1 Cor. 14:3), there is no comfort, nor anything that acts upon the soul to edification. This is the effect of divine love. There never can be real edification without divine love in some way or other being that which acts on the soul, or in which the soul itself is acting.

So the apostle brings these two gifts together at considerable length. He shows the perfect folly of these unknown tongues being dragged into the church simply

because they were a display of divine power. But what follows? We have the striking way in which the Spirit is brought before us here in His action; and again, how saints, unquestionable saints, having unquestionable power in the Spirit of God, may after all be fighting against the will of God.

What a lively picture it gives us, first of all, of the fact that the Spirit of God is come down to serve. His action might be all perverted, but still He was there. He did not withhold these powers. This is a very solemn thought. It is not only full of comfort in what is good, but extremely humbling as to what is evil.

And now, on what does this wonderful fact rest, that the Holy Ghost is here, and abides with us, and this for ever? It is not because of the saints; but because of Christ and Christ's redemption. This is the reason why no dark ways of men, no break-up of the church, drove Him away. The Spirit of God abode on and on; and will abide until the church is completed. Therefore it is no use for persons to say, "Where are those powers now?" This is not at all the question. The point is the presence of the Spirit Himself. But yet you will observe, when they had the power, there might be and was the greatest confusion. And when these powers are no longer displayed, what then? It is there unbelief comes in, and would ignore the grand truth of the presence of the Spirit in the church.

I ask you, beloved friends, can you say that God has taught you this truth; or are you indifferent about it? Is the presence of the Spirit that which brings you together to honour Him as Lord who died for you? I am sorry to say that it does not seem in many cases as if it

were; for I am afraid that some of God's children who have not sickness or other lawful hindrances, allow themselves just the breaking of bread, and no more, and so fail to magnify the Lord in His will and ways, and hinder their own blessing immensely. If it were a question of persons who could not get out, or of those who had no other opportunity, it would be most worthy of love and respect for souls to be quietly bearing such trial and difficulty; but I confess to you that it is great pain where one sees brethren who only put in an appearance on Lord's day morning — just keeping within the verge of that which entitles them to have their place in name, and no more. Precious as is the Supper of the Lord, when partaken of in the fellowship of saints, and according to the word of God, if thus it forms not only the staple but the whole of one's Christian service and worship in public at least, it seems to be only another form of Ritualism. The Lord does not deserve this at our hands; nor would He receive it from such as feel who it is that is waiting to meet us when we come together. And is the Lord there only when we break bread? Is He not there when we come together to join in prayer? Have we no petitions to offer? Or do we suppose that, because we do not take part actively, we have no place there?

It is indeed great forgetfulness of God, and of His working in all; for it is not only the great gifts, but, as we have it in Ephesians, "What every joint supplieth." It is not a question of chief men only, but what every one owes the rest. Surely, beloved friends, whatever may be the humble place that a saint of God has in the body of Christ, he has that place which is given him by God in the body — the church. If scripture is believed, you

cannot deny that it is a reality here; and if it be so, then there is not a joint in that body but what is meant, not merely to receive, but to supply good. No doubt, one great source of our weakness lies in the little faith that each saint has in the importance of his place to all the others. God is not working in the spiritual body, or in the natural one, entirely independent of the state and condition of the particular members. The spiritual body is a living body, and it is an intelligent body. In the house of God the Spirit dwells and acts. Is He not the "Spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind?" and is that true of those only whose voice is heard in the meetings of the saints? Is it not true of every one in whom He dwells, of each one that is a constituent part of Christ's body, as every saint is?

Let us have more faith, therefore, in what God has written for the common blessing of all, and more confidence in the Lord using those that may be little or weak. Their presence is a great thing, and still more the activity of their souls when thus present. Our place is not to criticise, nor to be displeased at this or that, to indulge in partisanship or any work that would thus grieve the Spirit; for in either way we should be coming together for the worse and not for the better. When there is the certainty of God being there, and that we are each forming a part of that which glorifies Him, what a difference it makes! How is it? Why, because in love we are seeking the edification of all; and, I say again, that it is not only what is said or what is prayed, but the tone of all, too, which has a great deal to do with it, the spirit in which we are there. Is it true, that when assembled we really are found in the truth of what we are there for — our souls going out in prayer, worship,

or whatever it may be? Inasmuch as it is a divine person that is present with us, He knows all hearts, and we need to look well to it how far we are hindering or helping on the object for which we come together — the glory of Christ.

But as the Corinthians were childish in this matter of the tongues, the apostle rebukes them severely, and demands (verse 7) what the effect would be if all were a jargon of sound; using all this to convict them of the folly of that which was practically a mere jumble of undistinguishable sounds. That the speaker should be understood is pressed in repeated forms (vers. 11-17). Not that the apostle did not speak with more tongues than them all; but in the assembly he had rather speak five words with his understanding, that he might teach others, than ten thousand words in a tongue (vers. 18, 19). He brings it down to this point (ver. 20), that they were only children as yet. “Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.”

Whether it be individually or as an assembly, the end for which God has redeemed us is His own glory, and the way in which He forms us for that glory now is through One who is here with us on whom we are called to lean, whose work and delight it is to exalt and commend Jesus. He has sent the Spirit on whose action we are called to count, no matter what the difficulty may be. Now take, for example, a case of discipline: I mention that because you are familiar with it. How would this show itself in the assembly as contrasted with the ways of men, or with a company even of God’s children acting on human grounds? How would the latter decide it? At best they would try to settle it, after the facts had been

brought before them, by a majority, by a show of votes. This is man's way. He knows no better, because the prominent idea is the men who are there, the individuals whose business it is to judge. How would faith in the presence of God — of His Spirit, how would this influence such a matter? The case is brought before the assembly. There may be a difference in the minds of those present. The facts are stated. There is perhaps a sense before a word is said that there is something lacking. There is dead silence. A brother rises (for God would not have us depart from the order of His assembly; there may be some sisters who may have a simple spiritual judgment as truly as men, but they do not violate the order of God), who states that he feels a difficulty, and he suggests that it would be well to inquire, to wait on God a little further. The assembly bows. Discipline is a thing that may not be forced. It is not a question of a majority, but rather of God giving an intelligent conviction to the assembly. Accordingly there is a pause in the proceedings. The case is examined a little more fully. The point of doubt is looked into. God does not refuse His light. Facts are brought forward again; during the pause the truth is brought forth convincingly. The doubt whether the case was not fully known, whether the sin under judgment was as grave as it appeared, is entirely removed. The facts are too plain; there is no doubt remaining any longer on the mind of any spiritual person; and discipline must take its course.

The church of God is entitled, by virtue of Him who is in it, to look for divine light; not to act in the dark, but to wait on God with the certainty of learning His own mind. Now, I do not deny that there may be in certain cases a mistake, but then there is always an intelligible ground

for seeing how the mistake has been made. The assembly might act hastily, and this very thing would convict it; for supposing you show that in a certain case of discipline they have been too ready to act upon a single testimony, no wonder they have not had the guidance of the Lord. For it is a plain scriptural principle that “in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.” It is an extremely humiliating thing when an assembly has to acknowledge that it has acted hastily; for the very fact of our being so gathered together is meant, as far as means can go, to correct what may be lacking in us as individuals. When really subject to the Lord, all is sure.

We are entitled, I say, to look for the guidance of God; but one quite admits there may be such a thing as a mistake. The assembly is no more infallible than an individual Christian. For what makes the assembly to be that of God is not that they are Christians, but that they have His presence there — God present and left free to act by His own word. And this is the ground upon which we do look for guidance. But then the same thing is true of an individual. He has God’s presence in him, but does this make him infallible? The truth is, there is no such thing as infallibility except in God Himself; but then we must hold, that, so far as an individual waits upon God, he is proportionately guided; and, of course, so far as the assembly waits upon God, they enjoy the same gracious guidance. But there is no ground for anything like high pretension, or the notion that there may not be a mistake, through haste, on the part of the one or the other, though it is far less likely in the assembly. We have to pray that, just where apt to be hasty through over-confidence, there we might be made watchful; as,

on the contrary, we must bear in mind that just because God's grace has put us into the place of the church of God, in that place Satan is peculiarly anxious to lower, pervert, and dishonour the name of the Lord Jesus by our means.

This should teach us to lean on the Lord, and, as God's assembly, seek to be faithful to His word. But it is most important to remember that God's assembly as a whole is now in a state of ruin. I should not trust the man who held this precious truth of the presence of God in the church, without the sense of the condition of things at this present moment. We need this deeply; for where this is lost sight of, there is apt to be rashness, and such dangerous high-mindedness in the use of truth, as would leave us outside the action of the Spirit of God.

So with a person who is brought to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not merely that He is brought to God through faith. This is quite true; but there is that also which puts the soul in the dust in the confession of its total ruin, as truly as there is the sense of the blessedness into which it is brought. And so it is now, when God has not merely placed us in such intimate relations with Himself as an assembly, but has also shown us the state of the church generally. And of all persons on the face of the earth, we ought to remember it most.

But again we observe another point of interest. We see in the course of this chapter the fact coming out that in the assembly, as Paul knew it, you have the same kind of action as we are familiar with. We have singing, we have praying, and we have blessing. The grand centre of the last was the table of the Lord, as we learn from the

preceding chapters (1 Cor 10 and 1 Cor. 11) Here, on the other hand, it is the action and presence of the Holy Spirit. But I would recall to you that we here read of just the same elements as are met with now, not all that then were, but as far as they go.

Coming to our subject, we see in this chapter that, powerfully as tongues might serve as a sign to unbelievers, what the apostle prefers a great deal is that which acts in and by the understanding of the believer. He takes particular pains to show that his feeling on the subject was not through jealousy, or because he had not so many gifts as they had. The apostle had no ground personally to decry in any way the gifts about which he was speaking; for (ver. 18) he says, “I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all.” But what he wanted was edification, that is, the building up of the saints. And the growth of the saints is inseparable from the activity of divine love on their behalf. This he therefore pressed. Whatever was not given for edification was unsuited to the church of God.

Here I may say as a principle, that this should guard us against any love of singularity amongst the saints of God — such as, among the young, the vanity of preaching on hard scriptures. Now, no doubt, by dwelling on some such portions of the word of God, there may be a kind of factitious interest attached to it, or by giving some application of a plain text that no one else has heard of. It always seems to me uncommonly small; and, further, I cannot but think it really shows rather a want of self-judgment and of earnest desire for the edification of the saints of God. The thing we should wish is what will manifest God. Could one conceive of Christ doing such a thing? I find in our blessed Lord exactly the contrary. He

was the absolute perfection of all grace and truth. How He takes the simplest fact, the most common subject of daily life! how He turns to account even the woman sweeping her kitchen floor, if I may so say, for a lost piece of silver; or the shepherd seeking for his lost sheep! The most trivial incidents in His hands are vehicles of the highest truths for the soul. For there it is where real power shows itself — bringing God into them, and making them the witness of His gracious interest in our souls. There is far more power when one sees in the most simple subject the dignity and grace of the Lord. It brings home to us God acting in Him. As for the other, it may be ingenious; but what if we never can trust it, whether it be true or not? How unlike God's ways!

But I merely mention this now, as giving a practical turn to the very principle that was then at work among the Corinthians. They were occupied with what would astonish and surprise, and not with that which would help the growth of the soul in the knowledge of God Himself.

The apostle comes now to another fact (ver. 21). He draws attention to the scriptures in the Old Testament that speak of foreign tongues. Whenever God's people came in contact with these tongues, they had got all wrong. If Israel had remained in their integrity, such strange sounds would have been kept far away. They were let loose on them when they departed from their true place. The Corinthians would do well to ponder, that foreign tongues in Israel's case had not a good connection; they might remind them of their folly and evil, being in no way an honour to the Jews.

Besides, for whom were the tongues meant? “Wherefore” (ver. 22), “tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not.” The Corinthians were using them for a display among believers — most wrong and unintelligent. “But prophesying” — that which they really slighted — “serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.” This is its direct use. But now he shows another thing, that although prophesying is not in its direct use addressed to unbelievers, it may have a mighty effect on them, and in a way too that tongues could not have. This he puts in a pungent form (verse 23). “If, therefore, the whole church be come together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?” Such would be the effect, supposing they were all speaking with tongues (and if it was good for one, it was for all). But (ver. 24) “if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all; and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest.” The result is that he is constrained to say “God is there.”

This is a point that I do impress on you as of the greatest importance for ourselves. We are called on to look to the Lord that we may not hinder the manifestation of God in the conscience even of an unbeliever. When we do come together as His assembly, let it never be that we may take part, but that He may work as He will, and by whom He will. Neither, again, let us be impatient. Our part is to count on Him; neither hindering others, nor refusing to go forward if He leads. Suppose that there is a silence that may be painful to some — never surely a sign of the power of God there, but, on the contrary, that

there is something which hinders — still let us not doubt but believe. He knows how to try and humble as well as comfort. The main thing is to seek now His unfailing presence and action. In the long run He never disappoints as man always does. But we do not go to sit silently, but to worship audibly and be edified. Silence is quite exceptional. For our God is not a mute God, but One who has spoken to us, and who gives us now to speak for Him and to Him. The church of God therefore is in no way the.witness of a dumb idol, but of the living and true God who is in the midst of it. We ought to desire when we come together that there should be no restraint; but even this is not so painful as the forwardness of those who would speak because there is an open door, not because God gives them the word.

We ought to pray then that, when we come together, God would manifest His presence there in our midst, and that nothing should be done that is not suitable to Him. It may be a very simple soul that He uses. I am sure that God can do it by one who has nothing of this world’s learning, and that He loves to do so. But still we must cry up neither unlearned nor learned, or suppose that there is any particular virtue in the mere circumstances of the saints of God, though it is a great witness that there is liberty in the assembly, when the simplest are welcome in their desires to edify. But this, remember, is for God, and not for ourselves. It is not done by giving out a hymn, or reading a chapter, because there is silence, and we can bear to wait no longer; nor is it because a particular chapter has blessed ourselves that it should be read. Why should not I be content to enjoy the chapter myself? Why bring it out then? Have I the assurance that God would have it to be

read there ? This is a very severe test; but surely, where it is God who gives the word, those who are spiritual would have the sense of it. Who is sufficient for these things? Our sufficiency is of God, who has given us His Spirit for this and all other ends in the church now.

The great thing, then, is the manifestation of God's presence in the assembly. It was, no doubt, an extreme case where the apostle supposes them all prophesying, but the principle is true in all cases. And we find, in fact, an important regulation as to this soon follows.

Another point we have in the 26th verse — "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.'' Now the apostle does not condemn this. He leaves it as an open question, to be judged on spiritual principles. I do not say that he approves of it: he states the simple fact; but he now brings in what was to judge that fact on every occasion. What is the great criterion here? "Let all things be done to edifying." Could they say so? Could the man who had a psalm say that his motive was to edify, or the man who had a doctrine or the like? Let them search and see. There is One who knows the truth; and this One is pleased to act in the church of God. It is thus a challenge, as it were, to God where the soul dares in His presence to act out of its own will and inclination. Can anything be more solemn than for a person to take part in the assembly unexercised, without continual self-judgment to see whether his motive arises from simple obedience to the will of God?

To press this would not hinder God's action, it would only question our own; and this is why God lays down

the principle. It would give seriousness. A man should think of Him before he speaks or reads. He should not give out a hymn simply because it was a sweet one in itself, or a favourite of his own. All those things might be true; and they might be well enough in one's own home; but here God is acting with a view to the edification of the assembly, and the point is, Am I confident in my soul that it is God who is guiding me? Now, the apostle Peter lays this down most positively where he says, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God"; not merely according to the oracles of God. One might speak according to the scriptures, and yet be out of season; for in this he might be wrong, because it is not what God is giving then, for He alone knows what is best and for His glory. The meaning in fact is, If any man speak, let him speak as His oracle, or mouth-piece then. It is a serious thing for one's soul. Am I sure that God would have this to be spoken now? Is it suited for God's assembly at this time? I ought to wait, if I am not sure about it. It is what the Spirit of God implies in the exhortation, "Let all things be done to edifying." But the later Scripture puts it expressly.

If there is solemnity on the one hand, there is also love and liberty on the other. If I am too much afraid, I must take care that I am not wrapping up in a napkin what is lent for the good of others. So we see one cannot escape from danger on either hand. The man who is always silent, because he is afraid, what witness is he of the grace that feeds the flock in due season? and on the other hand, the man who is always so ready to come forward, what witness is he? Alas! only of his own spirit, of his own self-confidence, nothing more. Hence what we have to look for is that God act here, and nothing

should satisfy us short of that. The spiritual will appreciates it, and every child of God reaps the blessing, though the carnal would, no doubt, prefer what pampers man.

But, further, the apostle lays down (ver 27) that “If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, and at the most by three, and that by course, and let one interpret.” If there were no interpreter, it had no business there. Edification is the rule absolute in God’s assembly.

In due course we come to the other thing — prophesying (ver. 29). Surely you could not have too much prophesying! This is what he says, “Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.” Why so? Because God is thinking of the edification of His assembly. Supposing half a dozen persons were to speak one after another, what would be the effect? Why it would really be too much of a good thing. It must be bewildering to many, particularly to the simpler saints; and God always thinks of the little ones: the stronger ones do not need so much His care, or, at least, not precisely in the same way. They might even get good by it. But God, I repeat, thinks of the little ones; and what would perplex the simple or be too much God here forbids. “Let all things be done to edifying.” So that, whilst the Spirit of God stops the strange tongues unless they could be turned to edification, He does not allow even prophesying beyond the measure that would be for the profit of all.

Then another thing laid down (ver. 32) is that the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. Because what some of these Corinthians maintained (judging

from the blow that is struck at it here) was that they could not interfere with prophesying. If any had the Spirit to speak, they must speak. Paul says to them, You are talking as men might who are possessed by spirits; that might be the case with a man under a demon; but is it so with the Spirit of God? The Spirit of God never puts a man, as it were, into a vice. He in His operation makes it no kind of necessity. In a moral way, He may lay it on the heart; but never do we find that a man is absolutely tied and obliged to speak. Balaam might have been in an extraordinary manner forced to give an utterance, just as his ass then spoke under that imperative power; but surely no one would speak of either as being analogous to the action of the Holy Ghost in God's assembly.

No, the Corinthians who said or pretended (as an excuse for their love of hearing themselves speak so often) that it was a necessity, were all wrong. This is a most important principle, and that too on the side of good, as well as a warning on the side of evil. For, as the 30th verse tells us, "If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace." Revelation had this simple place of superiority over anything else. The scripture was not yet all revealed. "For (ver. 31) ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." No power delivers from responsibility to the Lord in the use of the power; and He who is Lord has regulated the due use of each gift by His word, as here by the apostle's Spiritual power must subserve His lordship and bow to His authority. Irresponsible or irresistible power is not of the Holy Spirit.

In ver. 34 we hear of one class, and only one in the church of God, who are not allowed to take any part in public, viz., the women. Not that God does not give as precious gifts to women as to men; but whatever gifts be given them to exercise, it is not in the assembly that they are to be manifested. I am aware that some have used this as a reason for women preaching. The idea of women preaching to the world was an irregularity not even yet contemplated. It is not supposed that woman had so completely forgotten the propriety of nature. No Corinthian even wished women to go with unblushing face before the world, nor yet pleaded the case of "perishing sinners" as an excuse for forfeiting that retirement which always becomes a woman.

As for the women spoken of here, they might have argued thus — and I suppose they did: — "If we cannot preach, surely we might speak in such a holy place as the assembly. There the men will not misunderstand, or impute it to any want of decorum." If there was any place at all where women might speak, it surely was in the assembly. But it is forbidden there — not meaning by this that they were free to preach before the world, but that they might not speak anywhere publicly, not even in the assembly. I grant you that in their own homes or with women, there is a place; or a married woman might speak with her husband; but in the assemblies of the saints, I repeat, even there it was forbidden. What therefore was to be done? "If they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church" (ver. 35). He does not suppose that the young unmarried ones even wished to speak in the assembly, but only the elder ones. Of course, the younger ones would ask their parents.

“What,” continues he, “came the word of God out from you, or came it unto you only?” The word of God comes out from no church, and it comes to no saints exclusive of others. What a principle, and how deep-reaching and important for all! The reverse of this is what the church has always desired in one form or another. I do not know a single society that is called a church of man that has not sought to originate what ought to have been left to the word of God.2 When a church lays down its rules, when it formulates its beliefs, when it puts forth anything to be acted upon for discipline, or government, or doctrine, which is not in simple subjection to the word of God, it falls into the same error that the Corinthian church is here guarded against. It is evident that this church was really (not in the form, of course, but in principle) the progenitor of the present disorderly condition that exists in Christendom from the Pope down to the smallest sect of Protestantism. For what we find in the Epistle is, not that the Corinthian church was the only place where these gifts of the Holy Ghost were, but the place where He was interfered with, where much was perverted, where human principles were allowed to hinder the blessed action of the Spirit of God. To their charge accordingly was laid interference with the Lord’s place.

For there are two grand principles in the chapter, both working in connection with the central truth of God’s presence in the assembly. Around that uniting fact are these two guards — “Let all things be done to edifying” (verse 26), and “Let all things be done decently and in order” (verse 40): one, the working of the power of divine grace, and the other correcting and guarding the display of it; that, whatever might be done

in the desire for edification, there should be submission to the authority of the Lord Jesus. The church is for His glory, edification the aim, and this in comely order according to the word of the Lord.

It is instructive to remark here, as has been often done before, that no elders appear to have been as yet in Corinth. Such there were in many of the assemblies; and they were of course desirable in all when the due time was come. But in Corinth none are spoken of, where, if anywhere, it would be reasonable to hear of them. This is of great moment, because it proves that they are in no way essential to what God addresses as His assembly. In the most ecclesiastical of the Epistles, where church discipline, both in putting out and in restoring, are most developed, where we have the fullest light as to the Lord's Supper and the assembly of God, elders are ignored, and, as I believe, evidently were not. But it is mere ignorance to conclude that, where elders were, as at Ephesus, etc., the gifts were not exercised, or that the assembly of God was not looked to act as in 1 Cor. 12, 1 Cor. 14. The happy thought is that, when there are no apostles to choose, the Lord continues the presence of His Spirit. Have we faith to act on the ground of His assembly? But the one-man ministry, when used (as it is in Christendom) to deny His action by whom He will, and this in His assembly, is as unscriptural as the Papacy. They are guilty of impiously implying a change in the apostle's mind, who try to pervert 1 Timothy or Titus, or Revelation 1-3, so as to neutralise 1 Corinthians as well as to justify the device of the one-man minister. But it is all vain. Scripture, being divine and of course consistent, cannot be broken; and the Lord is speedily

coming to judge the many idols of those who bear but deny His name.

Thus then we have the presence of the Spirit of God making good the precious truth that God is in the assembly. There is the activity of His love in seeking the edification of His saints as the motive, but there must also be no infringement of the commandments of Him who is Lord (ver. 37). All these canons were no doubt written by the apostles, but they are none the less His commandments. The word of God comes to the Corinthian church — it does not originate thence. Further, it comes not to these saints only, but to all. The place of the church is never to teach but to bow to the word of God. The church has no authority in such matters — it can originate neither doctrine nor government. The church's place is to be subject, and this of course to the Lord. It is not exactly that the church is under the presidency of the Spirit of God: this I believe to be an unscriptural expression. The Lord is in that place; and hence the apostle brings in the Lord where it is a question of authority. The Spirit has taken the place rather of service; and hence (as pointed out the last time I spoke), where operations are brought in, the Spirit of God works all in power, but where it is a question of authority, it is the Lord Jesus. He it is accordingly whom the Spirit gives us to know as in authority over us when we come together, as at all other times. But we have to guard against the snare of those who avail themselves of Jesus being Lord, to deny that the Spirit both divides sovereignly and works all in all.

Let us be careful, while we seek only what is for edification, that all things be done decently and in good order, our aim being the promotion of the glory of the

Lord Jesus. Let us judge ourselves continually by the standard of the word, and, in particular, the assembly by these special scriptures which apply to it.

1 The Received Text omits ὅτε on small authority, and to the destruction of the sense which requires the adverb; but we have it in all the great witnesses to the ancient text,, B, C, D, E, L, P, more than fifty cursive manuscripts, Vulg., old Latin, Syr., Sah., Arm., Aeth. and many Fathers, Greek and Latin.

2 Take the Congregationalists, who used to take their stand on the sufficiency of scriptures. Yet even they always fail at the first step, the choice of a preacher or pastor by the votes of the congregation. This being absolutely unrecognised in scripture, and in principle wholly opposed to what is found there (which shows the Lord giving gifts and God setting in the church as He will), decided the late Mr. Isaac Taylor, of Ongar, to abandon dissent. But it is certainly no improvement to admit the choice of a bishop or the nomination of a patron. Apostles, or their delegates, did choose or appoint elders; but they, according to scripture, have no successors. The gifts were always immediate from the Lord, and never required human appointment. He abides to give, not they to choose. Christendom pretends to choose without authority, and despises the gifts of Christ, save where they fall under its own unfounded and unscriptural usurpation.