

The Christian Philosophy of Man

Eight Studies in 1 Corinthians

David Gooding

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[Back to the Gospel](#)

It is a tremendous stimulus, ladies and gentlemen, to see you in such great numbers, coming out on a wild night like this to study holy Scripture together. And I am the more encouraged when I remember that you have been straitly warned and suitably advised that these studies are going to be rigorous. I shall not, even if I could, be here to entertain you, and I shall not be preaching sermons. These are to be rigorous studies of the thoughts of the Apostle Paul, as written for us in his first letter to the Corinthians.

A few words, therefore, about these studies. Each one, I hope, will be more or less self-contained and make sense in itself, so if you cannot get to all of them it is still worth coming to some. On the other hand, because it is a large book and our times are brief and few, it would be an enormous help to you, and even to me, if I could count upon it that in the interval between the various sessions you read for yourselves and try to think about the contents of this wonderful epistle.

I shall obviously not have the time to expound every verse. There are sixteen chapters and we have four occasions to be together. Each of those occasions will contain a double session, eight in all, but the last session is reserved for your questions. If it is possible, please write them down, at least on the third occasion, so that I may have time to give them a studied answer and not just off the cuff. That leaves us with seven sessions for the actual study of 1 Corinthians.

So, my aim is not to expound every verse in this epistle, though every verse would warrant a sermon in itself. My rather smaller aim will be to direct our thinking to two of its major themes.

First theme: Back to the gospel

Second theme: The Christian philosophy of man

There are others, of course, and I shall not be claiming that these are the only major themes. But they certainly are two of them, and we shall discover that these two themes are related to each other. The first will occupy us in the first half of this evening, and it is the constantly repeated *slogan*, if you like, that rings like the tolling of a bell or the blowing of a trumpet through these sixteen chapters of the epistle.

First theme: Back to the gospel

It might perhaps at first sight seem strange to you that I should put such a caption over this epistle, because it is said by many well informed theologians, whose shoes I'm not worthy to carry, that this is to be classed as one of the Church Epistles, because it is full of directions and exhortations and regulations and advice on how we are to run our Christian churches. And

for that reason, without divulging any too carefully kept secrets, it is not necessarily a favourite epistle of all Christian people, because they feel that the nitty-gritty of church organization is at best a dull subject and not fit for our enjoyment.

I want to make the point therefore, straightaway at the beginning of these talks, that while this epistle could well be classified as a Church Epistle, and deals with the practice and activities of a Christian church, yet running through it all is this basic and constantly repeated exhortation. If we would run our churches right—if they are to be healthy and vigorous, their fellowship enjoyable and their testimony effective—we must, as Christian people, constantly come back to the gospel and check all our activities in church, our fellowships, our enterprises, our organizations, and submit them from time to time once more to the basic gospel of our salvation. All that we do and think and attempt must be consistent with that basic gospel.

Paul's commendation of the Corinthians

Let me begin by making certain observations of the church at Corinth. I shall necessarily have to say some hard things, so I would be guilty of complete misrepresentation if I did not remind you of the wonderful things Paul says about this ancient church. So, to launch our study, let us read them together.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Cor 1:4–9)

As you will see from these words, the church at Corinth was a brilliant church. Unlike some of the churches that were composed altogether of humble people, here there were some at least who were intellectually brilliant. Not many, but some. Not only intellectually brilliant, but, what is more to the point, brilliant in their spiritual gifts. Paul could honestly say about them that they were not lacking in any spiritual gift. What a brilliant church; a scintillating church they would have been, with every gift that God has to bestow. Whether it is prophecy or teaching or pastoral, or whatever it was, here was a church liberally and richly equipped by the risen Lord for the enjoyment of their spiritual fellowship. A brilliant church, therefore, and a church that, having every gift, had the means to prepare themselves as a church for each occasion and experience that is, or should be, the goal of all that takes place in a Christian church.

When Paul says they were gifted, he says, 'so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ' (v. 7). That immediately puts all our church activities in their true perspective, does it not? The meetings of the church become routine, the work that we do a little humdrum, and sometimes it is easy to forget what the goal of every church meeting is, or should be, and every activity is, or should be. It is to prepare us for that indescribably glorious experience that shall be when one day God, in his divine impatience, unable to wait any longer, will pull the very heavens aside and show to

the world his glorious Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. When the blessed and only Sovereign shall stage in this universe the revelation of Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Tim 6:14–16). Oh, what a magnificent day it will be for this universe, when God takes all the bunting he can from the storehouses of heaven and decorates the whole universe at the revelation of his Son, whom, having not seen, my brother, my sister, you love, don't you? Though you still do not see him, yet believing you rejoice with a joy that is already suffused with the glory that shall be (1 Pet 1:8).

It dawns on you sometimes more deeply and poignantly than others — at a prayer meeting maybe, at the Lord's Supper, at the reading of a verse of Scripture — and all of sudden your heart leaps. You feel you can almost see already the glory that shall be. Oh, the reality to look upon that face, to see which is the goal of a creature's existence. And we shall see him, not through a glass darkly but then face to face (1 Cor 13:12 KJV). Scripture tells us that, when we see him, such will be the effect of that vision that instantaneously we shall be like him — what there is of us.

An adult woman is like her parents. When she was a little baby you can begin to see the family likeness, can't you? Both the adult and the baby are like her father and mother — what there is of them. While we shall all see the blessed Lord and be like him, the goal of the activity of a Christian church is ultimately that we might be prepared and grow in grace, so that we will be formed in due spiritual proportions to him who is the head.

For that blessed goal, God had equipped this church with every gift, fulfilled with all spiritual riches. And more than that, the blessed Son of God, so Paul tells us, was committed to that church, for he had undertaken to 'sustain [them] to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ' (v. 8).

Wonderful words, those. How shall I stand before him? When on the Isle of Patmos his devoted apostle John saw the blessed Lord Jesus as he is now in his glory, he fell at his feet as dead. Even he, who in the Upper Room had nestled his head backwards on the very bosom of Christ, fell at the feet of the risen Lord Jesus as one dead. He is brighter than ten thousand suns in all his external glory, in all his moral beauty and purity; how then shall I stand and not wish to scurry away from the sight and relieve my eyes from the dazzlingness of his glory?

What tremendous comfort it is to us to be told that that same Lord Jesus shall 'sustain [us] to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ' (v. 8). Not only strengthened and confirmed by the blessed Lord Jesus himself, but all of it backed home by the faithfulness of God: 'God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord' (v. 9).

God is a realist, and it was of his own purpose and will and volition that he called us, beggars of the dung hill, little mites of beings. Who else would have dared to suggest it to the Almighty? What one undergraduate described in a more melancholy mood, as 'excrescences on the face of the earth — an eczema', said he, 'on the skin of the world'. Tiny little beings, and God has called us into the fellowship of his royal and divine Son to be companions of Messiah, fellows of the Christ, and that for eternity. God is a realist. Perceiving all it would take by way of redemption and subsequent rigorous refinement, having put himself to that task, he will be faithful to the project in getting us ready and preparing us for the enjoyment of the eternal fellowship of his Son.

And what is true of the Corinthians is true, *mutatis mutandis*, (the necessary changes having been made) of us all. Let us remind ourselves that this is the purpose of the church and the gifts within the church. It follows, ladies and gentlemen, that we cannot afford to be doodling away our time in the church on extraneous and irrelevant activities. All must ultimately somehow be geared to, and contribute to, the preparing of each member to stand before Christ and be his fellows for eternity.

The Corinthians made mistakes

That said, it would be less than truthful to hide from you that, brilliant church though they were, they were in many respects quite perverse. Now I must moderate my language about them because I shall have to meet them one of these days, and if I speak ill-advisedly and exaggeratedly about their shortcomings, then what will they say to me? Do they listen just at this moment? Who knows? And if I'm not too careful of my criticism of these ancient Corinthians, when my life's record comes out at the judgment seat of Christ, of course they won't think of being unkind, will they? I don't know whether heaven's grace will allow them to say, 'You gave a fine sermon that Saturday night, and accused us of all sorts of things; but, to be honest, were you really any better than we were?' I must watch what I say. So must you, actually, for this epistle was not written so that we might feel superior to them, but that we should not make the same mistakes as they did.

After all, they were one of the 'first generation churches', weren't they? They hadn't the long periods of history that we have had to teach us where mistakes can lead to, and we ought to behave better than they did with the experience that lies behind us. Before we are finished we shall have to judge ourselves quite critically, lest we are still guilty of the same mistakes as they were, and there would be less excuse for us.

So they were in that sense a reliable church. If there were two ways of doing things, a right way and a wrong way, they could be relied upon to do it the wrong way. They were in that sense very reliable! And a cursory reading of this epistle will give you the impression that there was scarcely anything that they didn't get wrong. How like us they were.

How Paul corrects them

Interesting to me is this emphasis that we find throughout this first letter, when we consider what Paul says in order to correct this early church: how does he bring them back to where they ought to be? It is quite evident that he doesn't simply get out the rule book and say, 'Now, my dear Christian brothers and sisters, you mustn't do that because it contradicts rule 1764, subsection D, in the book of Canon Law.' He doesn't do that. He's not behind, of course, in laying down rules and regulations. He is an apostle, and is to be heard on one occasion at least, saying, 'If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord' (14:37). If you would ever be inclined to say about a certain regulation of Scripture, 'That's only the Apostle Paul', then you'd better say it outside his hearing, because if he heard you saying it he would ask, 'What do you mean, "that's only Paul"?'

The mark of spirituality is now as it was then: that if anyone is spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things Paul writes are 'the commandments of the Lord' (KJV). But in

general, Paul doesn't set about putting these people right by quoting rules and regulations. What he constantly does is to say in effect, 'My dear Corinthians, you can't do that.'

'Oh, why can't we?'

'Well, because it contradicts the basic gospel.'

And time and time and time again he brings them back to the gospel and bids them review their behaviour, their methods, their organizations, their heart attitudes, their activities in the light of the gospel. That is why throughout this epistle every now and again there is some outstanding reference to the great work of Christ, his death at Calvary, that stands central to the gospel. Let us therefore trace this principle and notice that it is one of the major features of this epistle and of Paul's pastoral work. I must resist preaching, though I shall fail from time to time, but I want to point it out as one of the major themes, and one of my little contributions to your study of this first epistle.

The Dangers/The Answers

1. The danger: man's confidence in man rather than in God. The answer: the cross, Christ crucified
In chapters 1–4, Paul has to rebuke the church for a very serious wrong. At first it doesn't look very seriously wrong. It is that they had developed the habit of dividing themselves up in the church around different church leaders, and then taking labels for their groups after the names of these church leaders.

So some said, 'I am of Paul', and some said, 'I am of Apollos', and others said, 'No, I am of Peter'. They not only made little groups around these different Christian leaders and labelled each group after one of their names, but presently they began to boast in their leaders and fight each other as to which was the best leader and which was the superior group. More of that anon. Our interest now is to see how Paul corrected it.

'Oh, my dear brothers and sisters,' says he (see v. 10—he can't wait to get round to it), 'you can't go on behaving like that.'

'Why not?'

'Because it contradicts the basic gospel. It flies in the face of the very basic principle of the gospel. "I am of Paul", indeed! Was Paul crucified for you?'

'No, of course he wasn't. But you're talking about *the gospel* now.'

'Yes, indeed I am,' says Paul.

'But after that you have to organize your church in various ways, and surely it is right and proper to call yourself the Pauline group or the Petrine group, or the Apollos group or whatever? What's wrong with that?'

But Paul would say, 'If the very heart of the Christian gospel is the cross of Jesus Christ our Lord, you must not subsequently organize your church in any way that seems to go against the basic principle of the gospel.' *They must get back to the gospel.*

So there it was, the question of the cross of Christ, and in our second session this evening, God willing, we shall consider that in more detail.

2. The danger: desecration of the Holy Spirit's temple. The answer: Passover and unleavened bread; Christ sacrificed

When we come to chapters 5–7, we meet at the outset another area in which the Corinthian church was in grave danger of disaster. 'It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans' (5:1). Pagan Greeks took some shocking when it came to sexual permissiveness, but here was a Christian church that was allowing sexual irregularity that would have disgusted even pagan Greeks.

'You'll have to stop that,' says Paul. 'You really will.'

'Why? Hasn't Christ set us free? Is it not true that we're no longer under the law but under grace? Are we not free?'

'You have to stop it because what you've got hold of now is actually not true freedom at all. Listen,' says he, 'when Christ died at Calvary, he died as our Passover lamb' (see 5:7).

The very phrase evokes all kinds of memories of how Israel, the nation, were slaves in Egypt and how God came down to deliver them. They were delivered from the wrath of God through the shedding of the blood of the Passover lamb and set free from bondage (Exod 12).

Certainly they were free; but the divine regulation was that, at the very same moment as they were delivered from the wrath of God and from bondage to Pharaoh by the blood of the Passover lamb, they were required to keep the feast of Unleavened Bread. Interpreting that in the Rabbinic and then in the Christian way, Paul points out that it is a figurative lesson. Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed for us, to deliver us from the wrath of God; from the bondage to Satan and all his works. But just as Israel being delivered had to keep the feast of Unleavened Bread, so we being delivered must keep our feast of unleavened bread.

Now we're not talking literally, are we? We're talking of getting rid of the old leaven of malice and hypocrisy and corruption of every kind, and keeping the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. And the two things go together. You can't have the Passover without the unleavened bread: neither is optional, they go together.

'The kind of sexual freedom that you are allowing in Corinth,' says Paul, 'must stop.'

'Why?'

Because it is a perversion of the true liberty into which the gospel of Christ introduces us. Allow that kind of perversion in your church, and you might as well stop preaching the gospel. Back to the gospel, then.

3. The danger: idolatrous disloyalty to God. The answer: the table of the Lord

In chapters 8–10 a similar argument is to be heard. Here it was a question of eating food that had been offered to idols. The Corinthians once were pagans, and they had come to see that an idol, a statue of gold or wood or something, is in one sense a nothing. If somebody had offered meat to an idol and then sold it in the local butcher's shop, that hadn't done anything bad to the meat. It hadn't conveyed any germs or spiritual defilement to the meat, so if you went along to the butcher's shop you could eat the meat and not enquire where it came from and it wouldn't do you any harm.

Being quite intelligent people, the Corinthians had come to see, in that sense, that an idol is nothing. But starting from that premise they were now embarked upon behaviour that was perilous in the extreme. They were saying to themselves that, because an idol is nothing and the meat is not affected, it's okay if you arrange a dinner party in the heathen temple.

Heathen temples made quite a bit of money in that way. With all the meat that was being offered to the idols they could afford to put on a decent banquet, and you could invite your friends to join you. Like they do now, when people go to the races and big businesses have a tent where they entertain their guests.

In those days, if you were going to put on a little entertainment for your business friends, you took them to the local temple, where they would put on a dinner party for you with the meat that had been freshly offered to the idol in the idol's very own house. These Corinthian Christians were of the opinion that it was okay to do it. 'We're free, aren't we?' (see ch. 9). But this showed a fundamental misconception of the gospel.

They were in danger of idolatrous disloyalty to the one true God. Paul reminds them of this matter by now quoting another aspect of the gospel, and talks to them about 'the table of the Lord' (10:21). This is a delightful expression, isn't it? Ah, what God knows about cuisine! What a table he can spread when he chooses to. You can sense the delight in the words of the Lord Jesus when he says, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son' (Matt 22:2).

What a God ours is, and what a place heaven will be, when all the saints of every kind come and sit down at the royal messianic banquet of eternity.

The wine how rich, the bread how sweet,
When Jesus deigns the guests to meet!¹

Forgiveness of sins and peace with God, reconciliation and sanctification, the blessed fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and of God's own Son, and God himself. He the host and we his guests—what a marvellous thing it is. And do you suppose for one minute that you can sit at the table of the Lord and enjoy his food, and the next minute go down to the idol's temple and enjoy the idol's food?

You say, 'What's wrong with that?'

Well I don't know, ladies and gentlemen, how you view things. I suppose when you go on your weekend breaks to London, sometimes you go to the Hilton. Good cooking there! But, being tired of that, on another occasion you go to The Dorchester; and, then, wanting a change, you say, 'Well, what's wrong with the Savoy?' And, getting fed up with both, you go to McDonald's.

'It doesn't really matter if I've been going to the Savoy and then I go to McDonald's; it's not a question of disloyalty to the chef at the Savoy. I use him when it pleases me, but I'm not bound to him and I can go to McDonald's. It's not a question of loyalty; it's what I enjoy doing at the particular moment.'

Do you suppose the table of demons and the table of the Lord are alternatives, like The Dorchester and McDonald's? You cannot enjoy the benefits of the death of Christ, spread on the table of the Lord, without involvement with your host. Be they ever so small bits of meat, you cannot enjoy the benefits on the table of demons without involvement in their pagan idolatry.

¹ [C. H. Spurgeon](#) (1834-1892), 'Amidst us our Beloved Stands.'

'Don't you try it,' says Paul, to the Corinthians, 'for, if you do, you'll provoke the very God of heaven to jealousy' (see v. 22).

If you say, 'Well, this is becoming tough, all because of eating a bit of meat', then you have not understood. *Idolatry strikes at the very heart of the gospel*. There is only one God: 'Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other' (Isa 45:22). The cardinal sin that any human could be guilty of is disloyalty to the Creator. If we are disloyal to him that destroys the gospel, doesn't it?

When we come to study it on another occasion, it will be a heart-chilling thing to observe how little by little by little these dear Corinthians were slipping into a habit that, had they persisted in it, would have involved them in basic and fundamental disloyalty to the God of their salvation. *Back to the gospel*; and here it is to the table of the Lord, what it means, and what are the basic conditions for enjoying it.

4. The danger: disloyalty to headship and lordship of Christ. The answer: a new regime

And then in chapter 11 Paul has to rebuke these Corinthians for their behaviour at the Lord's Supper because they were behaving in such a fashion that it was impossible in fact to eat the Lord's Supper. Such was their self-gratification, their selfish gobbling up of their own food and drink, they were not only offending the feelings of their less wealthy fellow Christians, but they lost sight of its significance and what the Lord's Supper was about (vv. 20–22).

What is the Lord's Supper about?

'Well,' you say, 'that's easy. The Lord's Supper is there to remind us that Jesus gave his body and poured out his blood so that we should be forgiven. That's all it is; a moment or two would be enough for that, wouldn't it?'

Would it? It isn't just about that, is it?

THE NEW COVENANT

As our Lord took the cup on the first occasion and gave it to his apostles, he said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood' (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25).

'New covenant'—what was that about?

Why, the new covenant is God's gracious covenant, guaranteed by the blood of Christ, that he will put his laws on our hearts, and write them on our minds (Heb 10:16). So that, when as a church we meet together and we take the cup in remembrance of the Lord Jesus, we remember not merely that he gave his blood so that we might be forgiven, *we remember and take hold of his gracious guarantee that he will put his laws on our hearts*. That means doing deep and profound business with the Lord. It means on my side, the examining of my heart, the confession of my sin, and the laying hold on Christ and his faithfulness that, cost what it may, he will continue to put his law ever more deeply on my heart.

Here were these Corinthians coming to the Lord's Supper, so full of their jokes and little entertainments and their food and their whatnot; the one was hungry and the other was nearly drunk. And as for thinking about Christ putting his laws on their hearts, nothing was further from their minds; they couldn't think of it. And so, even in that sacred moment, what the very gospel of the new covenant was all about was obliterated from their minds.

'How could it happen?' you say.

But it is possible; and it happens still, doesn't it? I have been in places where the beat of the music was so loud at the Lord's Supper I couldn't hear myself think, and to concentrate on the sacred matter of the Lord putting his laws on my heart was quite impossible.

'We must get *back to the gospel*,' says Paul, 'and what the gospel is all about, for it is the gospel that controls the activities of the church.'

5. The danger: infringement of love. The answer: a new entity

'I gather,' says Paul, as he comes to chapters 12–14, 'that when you meet together it's somewhat of a hubbub, gentlemen. All of you talking at once, parading your gifts. Now, you'll have to stop that' (see 14:26–33).

'Dear, oh dear, Paul, you are so negative. Always telling us to stop things. Why must we stop it? It's enjoyable to express oneself and let one's emotions go. It's marvellous. You're such a spoilsport of an apostle. Why can't we do it?'

'Because you've forgotten two basics of the gospel,' says Paul. 'Each of us has his or her gift, but we're not independent little agents, each with his own stall putting out our goods. *We're members of the Body of Christ*, and the function of each member is not to please himself or herself, *but to serve the Body*. The church is a body in which all the members, as is appropriate on this occasion or that, exercise their own gifts and are not dependent on just one person to do it all. That's not some narrow minded ecclesiastical view; that goes right down to the basic gospel, doesn't it? Hear the lovely words of the gospel and consider the miracle that God has done. 'For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit' (12:13).

God in Christ has done this wonderful new thing in the universe. Michael the archangel hasn't got over the surprise of it yet! A new entity that never was before, the Body of Christ: the great fruit of Christ's sacrifice brought into existence on the day of Pentecost by God's Holy Spirit. And you, my brothers and sisters, are in it, and I am in it. It is because of that, we have any gifts to use; and so that we might use them well we must keep them in order and for the benefit of the Body. We must watch our motives, for to use my gift simply because I enjoy it and it makes me feel good would be in danger eventually of falling foul of *the basic principle of the gospel*, which is the very love of God. If I should seek a gift and if I should use my gift from any other motive but *love for the others*, then I am falling foul of the very basic principle of Christian behaviour.

6. The danger: denial of the resurrection of the body. The answer: back to the gospel

And finally, chapter 15. 'Come, my dear Corinthians,' says Paul. 'You can't go on saying the things that you're saying. You really can't.'

'What's wrong now?'

This time, it's their theology: their theological theories. We do need theology, don't we? Let me say nothing disrespectful of true theology. We need to love the Lord our God with all our minds as well as our hearts. Not to think through our faith, nor to be prepared to work as hard as we can with the minds that God has given us, and to love him with all our minds, is a breaking of the very first commandment: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind' (Matt 22:37).

But that said, it is a noticeable thing that every century or two the church has to be saved from the theologians. Where have the heresies come from? Not normally from those dear souls whom God has saved by his grace, who shall shine as veritable angels for the faithful work they have done for others. The heresies have more often come from the theologians, and it's where they come from still. How easy for us academically-inclined, who love to study, to become so advanced in our thoughts that they are no longer governed by the basic gospel, and we start inventing theories that, if carried to their logical conclusion, would deny the very gospel itself.

'How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?' (15:12). For if there's no resurrection, then Christ is not risen; and if Christ is not risen, the apostles who said he did rise are found to be liars. And what is worse, *if Christ is not risen there is no resurrection for anyone*. More than that, there is no salvation or forgiveness for anyone; we are still in our sins and are of all people most to be pitied.

In our churches, in our Bible schools and in our theological colleges, ladies and gentlemen, we constantly need to come back to the gospel, lest, imperceptibly wandering from it, we land ourselves in trouble, grieve the Lord, lose our power to grow in grace, and lose our effectiveness in our testimony to the world.

One major theme, then, in 1 Corinthians is *back to the gospel*.

Man in Relation to God

Man's Proper Confidence

Ladies and gentlemen, it is quite remarkable to see so many of you still here for the second session. A helpful introduction to what we must now consider would be if first of all we read from the Prophet Jeremiah:

Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me.' (9:23–24)

And then from 1 Corinthians 1:

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord'. (vv. 26–31)

Second theme: The Christian philosophy of man

The second theme in the Epistle to the Corinthians to which I would like to draw your attention is what I have entitled *The Christian philosophy of man*. Now that is a very grandiose title, suitable for putting on an invitation card; but all it means is that in this epistle we shall find an answer to that big and basic question that haunts many a mind: what is man? What are we, when all is said and done?

'Why,' you say, 'I am a human being. What else could I be?'

I'm glad to hear it; but then what is a human being? Are you an improved alligator? A bit of primeval slime that has gradually evolved to what you are now with no apparent purpose?

This lovely epistle will give us many an answer to that question as it reminds us what it means to be truly human: a true human being as God designed human beings to be. What it means, in fact, to be a truly redeemed human being. Redeemed from the great disaster of sin that has overtaken our fallen world; redeemed and in process of being restored to the very image of God, as we were originally created.

Now this theme—this philosophy of man, this answer to the question, ‘What is man?’—is not a theme that I am about to impose arbitrarily on 1 Corinthians. It is a theme that flows naturally out of the first theme that we thought about, *Back to the gospel*. If everywhere in this epistle Paul is bringing Christian people back to the basic gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, it follows that we are bound to hear much in it about what God’s redemption has done for us human beings. And more than that: it will tell us of those coming glories and what we shall be when God has finished with us.

You see, the glory of the Christian gospel is that it does two things for us, which this epistle brings out very firmly and delightfully.

1. It restores human beings from the disastrous results of the fall to the image of God our Creator, and puts us right.

But there is something even more wonderful about the gospel. It wouldn’t be enough to say that redemption simply restores us and takes away the results of the fall, glorious though that would be. God’s redemption is going to do infinitely more for us than just restore us. The second half of this epistle will remind us of God’s breathtaking scheme for redeemed humanity. When God came to redeem us through Jesus Christ, he was not content just to set us back to what we were before Adam sinned.

2. What God has done is to start a new human race. If Adam was the first man from whom we are all descended, God said to himself, ‘It will not be enough to restore man to what he was before Adam sinned’. God has introduced a second man, the very Lord from heaven.

Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. (1 Cor 15:45–47).

It is too much for me to be able to explain to you, or make you feel the sheer wonder of it. This is the true evolution that God has started again in a Saviour who is truly man—son of Adam; but a Saviour who is not merely man, but the very Son of God incarnate—a life-giving spirit. He started again, and the wonder of this is not only the incarnation in human form of God, the very Creator of the universe; not only the wonder that God incarnate died for our wretched sins that we might be forgiven; the wonder is not only that he has forgiven us, but he has done a superb thing. He has joined every believer with the Son of God himself and created a new thing in the universe that wasn’t there before. It is called the Body of Christ, in which we are members, each retaining his or her own personality, and yet no longer a completely independent entity but a member of the Body, sharing the very life of God. How shall I talk about it without slipping over into exaggeration for the wonder of it, but you’ll forgive me, won’t you?

Not only to be forgiven, but you who started in Augher, Clogher, Fivemiletown, or some obscure place like that, and a sinner as well, should not only be forgiven but taken up into the Holy Spirit of God himself. How will you sit there and take it calmly, I wonder? Joined with the Lord Jesus, put into the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit in you, as I said earlier, Michael the archangel hasn’t got over the surprise yet.

That is already true, but there are more wonders. ‘What is man that you are mindful of him?’ (Ps 8:4)—I’m going to tell you what you’re going to be one day. What does it mean to

be a redeemed man or woman and part of the Body of Christ? What will it be like when the Lord comes and we see him?—‘in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed’ (1 Cor 15:52). Changed bodily, with a glorious body like the body of our risen Lord Jesus himself. And not only changed externally as to our bodies, but what is vastly more important, the inhabitant of the body—the real you, the real me, conformed to Christ; heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 8:17).

As the late C. S. Lewis used to say, if you could see that woman who is a believer, who’s sitting beside you, not as she is now but as she shall be when the Lord comes, you would be sorely tempted to fall down at her feet and worship her. John tells us that when he saw an angel in his vision, overcome by the glory of that celestial being he fell at his feet to worship the angel (Rev 19:10).

I have to tell you on the authority of Christ’s word, so this is not meant to flatter you, you shall be above angels. They are but servants of the redeemed: ‘Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?’ (Heb 1:14). You will be seated with Christ, ‘far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named’ (Eph 1:21).

Oh, what a wonderful topic this is. What is man?—what does it mean to be human, to be a redeemed human personality? That’s what the church is about. This is not some optional course added on to the gospel, you know. Some people talk like that. You can hear it said sometimes by way of advanced criticism of some believers, ‘they never get beyond the gospel!’

We know what they mean. The simplest statement of the gospel that a child could understand: ‘Jesus loves me, this I know; and he died for me at Calvary so that I might be forgiven and go at last to heaven.’ Well, if that’s the total gospel you know, God be praised that you know it. You need to get beyond it, but you’ll never get beyond the gospel. There’s not a comma in God’s word that isn’t gospel. The gospel will not be exhausted until you reign with Christ on high, conformed to him in body, soul and spirit, and enjoy the ever-expanding and never-exhausted grace and ingenuity of God in all the glories he shall prepare for you. That’s the gospel. You’ll never get beyond it.

What is man?

You’ll see how this first part of the epistle and its contents are bracketed together by the remembrance of God’s faithfulness: ‘God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord’ (1:9).² And as it begins so it ends: ‘God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it’ (10:13).

² See [Chart](#) on p. 104.

1. Man in relation to God (chs. 1–4)

Danger: man's confidence in man rather than in God. Answer: the cross: Christ crucified; the wisdom and power of God

In chapters 1–4 we are about to find man in relation to God. What is man? And here Paul points to the danger into which the Corinthians were falling: that their confidence should drift away from God, and instead of their basic confidence being in God it would come to be in man. And that, of course, is to pervert a human being, as presently we shall see. It perverts a human being from the bottom upwards and from the inside outwards, and altogether and entirely. If this element in a human personality is perverted it will lead at last to the complete dissolution of that human personality.³ We are creatures of God, and unless our confidence is in God our personalities in the end will disintegrate. That flows from what the human being is. We are not self-made men and women; we did not make ourselves.

Human confidence is important psychologically, isn't it? Let a person lose his psychological self-confidence and a personality will begin to disintegrate. What is true psychologically is true spiritually, because the reality is, I repeat, that we did not make ourselves. We are creatures, and thus dependent upon God every minute of the day.

Just imagine what God has had to do to keep you alive today. He had to keep the whole planet going, because if it had gone from under your feet where would you have been? And to keep the whole planet going, it had to have so much water in the oceans, and so much dry land, and it had to have an atmosphere, and who knows what else. And then it had to have a sun up in the sky, and a moon. And all those galaxies that the scientists tell us are essential for the production of the carbon that is necessary and absolutely indispensable for life—and thus, and thus, and thus. And if you were the only person on earth, just ponder what the Almighty has had to do to maintain your life.

And the corollary is that as human beings our confidence must be in God. Here is where the devil early on played his master card and introduced sin into the world. What kind of sin? Well to be sure, he didn't provoke Adam into pulling his wife's hair, or being violent to her before breakfast every morning. Of course not. It was a very sophisticated and attractive sin.

'Look at that beautiful tree,' said he to Eve. 'It is good for food; why don't you eat it? And the aesthetics of it: isn't it beautiful to look at? You know, Eve, you really want to grow up, eat the fruit of this tree and you shall be as God. It's rather cramping your style, isn't it, always to be dependent on God to tell you what is right and wrong?'

The man fell for it, and in that moment became a fallen creature, taking the first step towards final dissolution of a human personality, when confidence is placed somewhere other than in God. Notice the skill of the old serpent: their confidence was now placed in a tree that God himself had created.

You say, 'What was wrong with the tree?'

Nothing. God doesn't make bad things. But to trust anything, however good, as an alternative to trusting God, as a means to independence of God, that is ruinous. God complained of it through Jeremiah: 'Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches"'

³ See [Question One](#), p. 88.

(9:23). There's nothing wrong with riches; have as much as you can honestly get hold of. But there is everything wrong if, as we accumulate riches, imperceptibly our trust begins to be in riches instead of God.

Let not the wise man put his confidence in his wisdom; that is, glory in it. Not in the sense of foolish boasting, but 'his basic confidence', the Hebrew means. Let not the wise man put his confidence in his wisdom. There's nothing wrong in wisdom, it is a gift of God; but if we then put our confidence in our own wisdom instead of in God, we are on the way to ultimate and consummate folly and disintegration.

And let not the mighty man put his confidence in might. Nothing wrong in being powerful, is there? I wish I were, instead of being a little titch of a chap! But if we allow our confidence—our basic, ultimate confidence—to be in our might instead of in God, we are perpetuating the fall of humanity and the end will be disaster.

What would God's answer be to this problem?

You'll see that the first step God had to take in restoring us human beings to being truly human must be to smash that false confidence of trusting in man—in ourselves, in other people—as the ultimate ground of our salvation. How will God smash it? He did it by the cross of Christ. Now Paul is using his terms very carefully and exactly. He could have devoted his first four chapters to the death of Christ. If Christ died for our sins, is that not the gospel (see 1 Cor 15:3)? Of course it is. Why won't it do then? What does it matter whether you refer to 'the *cross* of Christ' or you refer to 'the *death* of Christ'? Well, it matters everything.

The death of the great Greek philosopher Socrates was a very noble death, as in quiet confidence he took the poisoned cup from the jailer, drank it, and with all dignity lay down and died. That would not offend anybody's sense of nobility, but the cross would. The cross as a means of death was thought to be the most disgraceful, shameful death that anybody could die. God chose the cross as the way Jesus should die, and he did it on purpose.

What for? To deliberately expose man's folly. Jesus was crucified by the so-called wisdom of this world, wasn't he? High political and religious wisdom: Caiaphas the high priest, negotiating with Pilate the Roman governor, and consulting with Herod. 'You know nothing at all,' said Caiaphas to his fellow members of the council. 'When it comes to high powered religion and politics, you can't afford to be innocent little children. It is expedient for the cause of God and for the good health of the body politic that this Jesus must die, and the faith that the common people have in him be smashed.' And they devised a cross.

What fools they were, for three days later God raised him from the dead. What sheer ignoramus were these men that crucified Christ: 'None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory' (1 Cor 2:8). None of them knew this hidden wisdom of God. God was making a fool of mere human wisdom—he did it on purpose.

The cross of Christ was God's means of exposing human sin. Look at that cross—that mangled, torn, bruised, thorn-crowned human body—and see what human sin does when it is finished. You see, ladies and gentlemen, it wasn't just the ugly metal teeth of the scourge that ploughed his back. It wasn't just that, was it? Bad as it was, it was the spite and the envy, and the political knowhow that ordered the whip to be used. See in that mangled form what

human sin results in. And when they blindfolded him and said, 'Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?' (Luke 22:64), thinking how clever they were. It wasn't Christ who was in the dark, was it? It exposed the blindness of the best that human wisdom, apart from God, can be.

It exposed our sin, but it was the way to the cure. For the gospel is that if it were necessary for Christ to be crucified so that I could be forgiven, then I was utterly helpless to save myself. If there had been a law given that could produce life, then surely salvation would have been by the law? But if God had to go to this extreme to save me, it shows that not all my wisdom, not all my might, not all my religiosity could save me—'Thou must save, and thou alone'.⁴ There in the cross of Christ, see its wisdom and its power through its apparent folly and weakness. If humans were to be saved, then not only must God smash that foolish spirit of independence, but he must entice that human spirit back to put its trust absolutely in God. How would you do it?

There's nothing wrong with philosophy, you know, as methodological thinking. Let us not be foolish and embrace obscurantism and suppose that ignorance rather than education is what is valuable. God made us to think and to use our brains, and philosophy as the science of thinking is an exceedingly good thing; but it can't save you. Not all the logic, be it ever so impeccable, could change this sad, fallen human heart. Indeed, the danger of philosophy is—particularly if you're good at it—that it will encourage you to trust in your own wisdom, which will perpetuate the trouble. The need is to convert that human spirit back to trust in God.

How will God Almighty get me to trust him against all the enticements that the devil can put in my way? If God can't get me to trust him then I'm lost indeed; and if God can't get me to trust him, God himself in some sense has suffered defeat at Satan's hand. How would he get us to trust him? See the divine wisdom of God—

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. (1 Cor 1:20–21)

They might have philosophized that possibly there existed an Almighty; but knowing him—heart to heart knowledge of God, philosophy never led to that. What could? 'It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching . . .' (KJV). He's not saying that preaching is a foolish method. Preaching is a very good method; it's the foolishness of the *message* preached. That is, the message of the cross of Christ: it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

How does he get us to believe it is in the cross of Jesus Christ, God's Son? When you look at that cross and the mangled form of the one who dies there, it dawns on you, 'this is God', and you come to believe the almost incredible, 'the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world' (1 John 4:14). 'Is that God, and he died like that for me so that I might be forgiven and trust him and love him?' This is what performs the miracle that no philosophy ever knew how to do.

⁴ [Augustus M. Toplady](#) (1740-1778), 'Rock of Ages, cleft for me' (1776).

Isn't it true? Isn't that the bedrock of your salvation? Isn't it ultimately the basis of your confidence; not only as you began the Christian life but as you proceed through all life's difficulties, trials, doubts and the arguing of your inner heart when, like Job, you cannot understand the ways of God? Satan raises the question, 'You can't go on believing in God after this, can you?' And you are brought back to the bedrock of your confidence: 'He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?' (Rom 8:32).

What does it mean to be human? If we start right at the core of human personality, it means someone whose confidence has been brought back to rest absolutely and undeviatingly in God. But if that's what a true human being is, and if the tactic God has used to save us is the cross of Christ, see how the believers in Corinth had drifted, and how in the life and activity of the church they were in danger of perpetuating the very wrong attitudes from which the gospel was designed to deliver them.

What were their wrong attitudes?

You will perceive at once, therefore, the danger of leaving the gospel behind, and then seeming to make advance, which all the while is not advance, but a going backwards. Says Paul:

For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarrelling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, 'I follow Paul', or 'I follow Apollos', or 'I follow Cephas', or 'I follow Christ'. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? (1:11-13)

You say, 'What's wrong with that?'

We have to go very gently here, and hope they're not listening just for the moment while I criticize the Corinthians, but how should we talk about them without getting very red faces ourselves? If someone who knew nothing about Christianity came down from Mars, walked through Belfast and looked at the notice boards of our churches, he'd have a job to find out what they were, for the one name that often isn't there is 'Christ'. There are a thousand and one other names and descriptions, aren't there? How funny that is!

You say, 'Yes, but the name we have for my church is very important because we have got hold of a very important doctrine of the Christian faith. Some other Christian folks have got the wrong idea, and we want to stand for this doctrine. That's why we call our church after this particular doctrine.'

Oh! Can your doctrine save you? Was your doctrine crucified for you?

They said, 'I am of Paul', and with stinging rebuke Paul says 'was Paul crucified for you?' What a misconception that is, to call yourself after a Christian leader, however good a Christian leader he is. Paul taught them about the cross of Christ. He came and preached the gospel, but Paul couldn't save them. When it came to that, Paul had to group himself with the believers, the very worst of sinners, and like them he was absolutely bankrupt. It is Christ, Christ alone, Christ crucified, who saves.

'Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?' (v. 13). He could be a trifle sarcastic at times when sarcasm was good. Were we baptized in the name of Paul? Well, mercifully not. That's one thing I like about Christendom. It has never descended to that folly, though it has done

some other remarkable things. We've multiplied names that are guaranteed to confuse anyone from Mars as to what we stand for; but when it comes to baptism, mercifully we are baptized in the name of Christ.

What an insult it would be to the unique glory and dignity of Christ to say, 'I baptize you in the name of Jesus and the Apostle Paul'. 'I baptize you in the name of Luther.' 'I baptize you in the name of Luther and of Christ.' Heaven itself would shudder. When it comes to salvation, Jesus Christ our Lord stands unique. We are rightly baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and none other. And if for our salvation it must be Christ and only Christ, it is in his name that we are baptized, and to have any other name would dishonour and be derogatory to the unique glory of our Saviour. How do we let ourselves call our churches by other names?

I can't pass over this without saying that the names very rarely represent what the dear believers stand for. Now I'm greatly daring, am I not? You see, even gospel halls stand for more than the gospel. God bless my dear Baptist friends; what lovely souls they are and loyal to the Lord Jesus. But 'Baptist' is a very poor description of them because they don't believe just in baptism. They believe in the cross, and redemption and sanctification, in the deity of Christ, and in the coming of Christ.

Why can't we be content with the name of Christ? The Corinthians were not only adding labels, they were then beginning to fall out among themselves and boasting about their leader. He was the 'bee's knees', and the other chap was an 'also ran'. Presently they were dividing the people of God, and then at strife with one another as to which was the better leader. 'Look,' says Paul, 'you're not only detracting from the glory of Christ, you are defeating the deliberate strategy of God.'

The man may be very gifted, spiritually wise, spiritually powerful. He may be a glorious servant of God, but if we put our faith in him and our basic confidence is not solely and utterly in God and his Son Jesus Christ, then we are going counter to the strategy of God that he employed in the cross of Christ.

'For Jews demand signs' (v. 22)

They liked a lot of signs and God in his mercy used signs. The Gospel of John records signs that were profitable in leading people to faith, but that isn't quite what the Jews wanted. They sought after signs. When Christ did one sign, that wasn't enough. 'So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?"' (John 2:18). Christ had already done several. 'Do another one, and another one, and another one.' What was happening? They were looking for marvellous signs to excite them. The more power and the more signs the better, until our Lord had to turn away from them. 'But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it . . ."' (Matt 12:39).

If signs lead us to put our faith in God, that is glorious; but when we think we are independent and God has got to come and do his signs, we put ourselves in the judge's seat and we decide if the signs are good enough.

When my car breaks down I take it to the garage man and he performs near miracles. But if he doesn't do the miracle quite right I dismiss him and go to another garage man who can do bigger miracles.

That's how the Jews were. Do you see the wickedness of it? It puts me in the driving seat. God has to come and satisfy me by doing sufficiently big miracles, and if he doesn't do them I don't believe. That's putting a pistol to God's head isn't it?

'And Greeks seek wisdom' (v. 22)

Well, there is abundant wisdom in God's salvation. But that isn't quite the point. The Greeks put themselves in the judge's seat. If God could convince them, they might believe. But they were the final arbiters: their wisdom would be the final arbiter over God himself. Poor little humans, with a brain given to them by God that is now to some extent defective. Instead of putting their faith in the God who gave it to them, their brain becomes independent and the final arbiter, and God must submit to their adjudication. That is an utter perversion of the relationship between mankind and God.

That's why God has deliberately used the cross, for this is the way that will rightly show the bankruptcy of human wisdom and strength, and simultaneously elicit faith in God.

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (vv. 26–29)

Not many mighty, not many wise are called, are they? That is deliberate; for if God had simply called the wise, the great intelligences or the nobility of the world, we should have come to the conclusion that you have to be exceedingly wise to get converted and to be saved. Sometimes some theologians almost give that impression, don't they? You've got to be marvellously intellectual to be saved. And the opposite is true, of course. Intellect is good, but you don't have to be intellectual to be saved. That's why God has not chosen many wise or many noble, but the weak things of the world, so that he might confound and put to shame the mighty. Why? 'So that no human being might boast in the presence of God' (v. 29). For flesh to stand and boast in its own wisdom, its own strength and its own intellect before God Almighty, is not only an absurdity but such an affront to almighty God that it ruins a person's relationship with God.

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord'. (vv. 30–31)

God did it deliberately, to teach us that it is of God that we are in Christ Jesus. Here is a very practical question. Who put you in Christ—who put you into the Saviour? Was it your own capability? You are so highly logical: was it your ability of logic that eventually put you into Christ? If so, I should be very jittery. What happens a little later in life when your logical powers begin to diminish, like mine are? Your logic might take you out of Christ one day, mightn't it?

Who put you in Christ?

'Well,' you say, 'there came a charming preacher. He wasn't like some of these lecturers—he just preached for a short time and he was so user-friendly. He had such a beautiful way of putting things. When he said "Mesopotamia", it was delightful!' He put me in Christ, he was such a powerful preacher.'

Well, if that's what put you in Christ you'd better start trembling now, for one of these days there'll come a better preacher and he'll take you out of Christ.

It is of God that you are in Christ Jesus—not by your own ingenuity. God did it deliberately. That is a very important thing to learn.

Not by human strength or ingenuity

I quote you just one example from the Old Testament. It is the very famous and well-known story of David and Goliath. You have known it since your Sunday school days, have you not? To understand it, it is good to read it in its context.

Put as briefly as I can, the context is this. In the days of the Judges, Israel didn't always behave themselves. They went wrong and came under the power of the enemy, and God had to deliver them. When they got into misery they called to God and he raised up deliverers: Gideon and Jephthah, and people like that.

After a while Israel got a bit tired of that. It was a nerve-racking business if you had an Ammonite and all his hordes breathing down your neck and you have to wait on God to raise you up a deliverer. What happened if God didn't move quickly enough? It was a nail biting uncertainty to have to wait on God. So they said to Samuel, 'We've had enough of this kind of uncertainty. Make us a king, so that when the enemy comes we shall have a king installed, ready to defend us' (see 1 Sam 8:5).

Samuel didn't like that. God didn't either, actually. There's nothing wrong in having a king; God would raise up the great King David, and Jesus Christ is the supreme king. But if you have an organized institution, the aim of which is to save you from having to wait on God, then you are in a bad way indeed. So God in his mercy, faithful to his people as always, decided to teach them a lesson.

'So, you can't wait on me, gentlemen; it's too hair-raising? You want a king to be instituted, so that when the enemy comes the man is already installed and he can save you', says God, 'What kind of a king would you like? What about this one?'

And God presented them with a chap by the name of Saul. He was some man; head and shoulders above all the others. When they saw him, they said, 'God, you are wonderful. That's exactly the kind of king we would like: a big man who will save us.'

He put fear into the Israelites—talk about a spiritual dictator, but that's beside the point. When Saul said 'come out' they came out. All went well, until one day out of the ranks of the Philistines there came Goliath (1 Sam 17). If Saul was a big man, this chap was an absolute Mount Everest of a man. Oh what physical strength and experience he had: he was the leading single hero combat fighter in the Philistine army. Now what's happened to big man Saul? He's skulking in his tent. You see, that's the trouble with big men: they're all right until a bigger man comes along on the other side.

My friend, if some big preacher put you in Christ you'd better start fearing. One day there'll come a bigger one, and he'll take you out of Christ.

Faced with Goliath the giant, Saul says to David, 'If you must go and fight this giant, take my armour and my sword.' That was stupid! Can you imagine David going to fight Goliath with Saul's sword? Here comes David with the sword, about two-foot long, and Goliath's armour-bearer's got a spear about half a mile long. 'Excuse me, let me get nearer to you!' says David. They would have skewered him before he'd got anywhere near using his sword.

But the battle was won, wasn't it? How? Well, under God's good directions David took the simplest weapons you could ever think of.

Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine. (v. 40)

Goliath was furious at this insult. He was the leading expert in single hero combat, and they send against him a little boy with a stick like you'd use to chase a dog out of your backyard. It was an insult to him, but David preached him a lesson.

Then David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hand.' (17:45-47)

'I'm going to kill you today, Goliath, and the reason I brought these contemptibly weak instruments is to show Israel that it's not a question of who is the bigger man between you and me, nor who has the bigger weapons. I use these weak weapons so that all Israel may see that the victory is given by God himself.'

Back to the principle of the cross

To those who are perishing, it is the weakness and apparent foolishness of God; but to those who believe it has proved to be the wisdom and the power of God (1 Cor 1:18). It is vital, my dear brothers and sisters, that as we begin so we proceed all the way along. We thank God for every gift he gives us, for every Christian leader he gives us, but ultimately our faith must be in God.

Let us see to it that the way we organize our churches and all the methods we use shall display the truth of the gospel, and show that we stand firm by the principle of the cross as the wisdom and the power of God to bring men and women back to God and to the beginnings of salvation.

What is man?

A redeemed man and a redeemed woman are those who, through the cross of Christ, have been brought to abandon ultimate faith in all else, themselves included, and put their faith and confidence solely in God. Oh, my friend, if you've done that, what a future you have. This is the bedrock of what will eventually be your glorified personality.

Man and his Body

False and True Freedoms

For those of you who were not here on our last session, just let me say that on the first occasion we decided to follow two major themes in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

1. Back to the gospel

In the first place we noticed how, in correcting the many faults in the church at Corinth, Paul proceeded by calling the believers back to the gospel. Not necessarily by quoting this rule and the other regulation, but constantly reviewing their behaviour, showing it to be wrong by calling the church back to the underlying principles of the gospel, and bidding the believers to correct and order their behaviour according to its basic principles.

2. The Christian philosophy of man

We noticed, in the second place, that, in calling the believers back to the gospel, Paul indicates, incidentally if not intentionally, what his philosophy of man is. By 'philosophy of man' what I mean is that, in the gospel that Paul brings us back to, we have God's idea of what it means to be truly human. *What is man — what does it mean to be truly human?* And on the last occasion we started by observing the reminder that a human being is not a self-made entity: it is God who has made us and not we ourselves. And similarly, man is not only a God created creature, but, having fallen, he cannot save himself. So, if man is to be saved, that same God who created him must save him.

Because that is so, it is a fundamental characteristic of being human that our basic confidence—that core confidence that keeps us together as integrated personalities—must always be and remain in God himself. Certainly not in ourselves, but in God. We noticed that it was a result of the fall, perhaps also in part the occasion of it, that man was tempted to withdraw his confidence from God and put it in himself, in his own judgment; to try and be as God, and to that extent independent of God. We noticed how that fundamental mistake has perverted humankind.

And then we remembered the seriousness of that for the human personality. If men and women go on like that, with their confidence anchored not in God but in something else, then, according to the solemn warnings of holy Scripture, people who do that will find in the eternity to come that their very personalities disintegrate. They will perish, for there is only one thing that will keep a human personality truly human, and that is the basic core confidence in God.

The cross of Christ

And therefore we noticed in the early stages of his letter how Paul preaches the gospel once more to the believers in the church at Corinth. He brings before them the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ and expounds God's deliberate strategy in saving us: not merely by the death of Christ, but by *the death of the cross*.

Paul explains how our salvation by the death of the cross is explicable on these terms. It is the cross of Christ that is calculated to smash man's confidence in man, by exhibiting the sorry lengths to which man's misplaced confidence eventually leads him. God's deliberate strategy is to restore man's confidence back into the only place it should be, into God himself. With that confidence properly restored, there begins the great work of redemption of the human personality.

We do not have time now to go into all the detail of the first four chapters; we must move on and consider chapters 5–7.

2. Man in relation to his body and to marriage (chs. 5–7)

Danger: desecration of the Holy Spirit's temple. Answer: Passover and unleavened bread

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (6:19–20)

The first and most important thing to grasp at this juncture is this: man not only has a body, but the human physical body is an integral part of the human personality. So if you ask what does it mean to be human, then part of the reply will be, 'A human being has and is a physical human body'. If you ask what it means to be an angel, you wouldn't be able to say that an angel has a physical body. Humans have; and the Christian view of his body is not merely that a human being has a body; that body is an integral part of the human personality and will remain so eternally.

How different Christianity is from some of the Greek philosophies of the ancient world, and how gloriously different it is from some of the Hindu philosophies in the present world. The Christian is taught to respect and to value the body. It is not, as some of the Greeks taught, that the body is a kind of tomb for the human soul. It isn't to be regarded as something unworthy and demeaning, so that if we would be spiritual we must learn to live as far away from the body as we possibly can. That is false. And we are not to look upon the body as a regrettable material part in our make-up, as Hinduism teaches, so that our ideal and our goal would be to be able one day to escape a material body and be merged with the universal spirit. That is not Christianity. Christianity teaches the importance, the wonder, the dignity and the worth of the human physical body. It is an integral part of the human personality.

You will see that by what our Lord did and said when he came among his disciples in the upper room after his resurrection. When the apostles first saw the living risen Lord in their midst they took fright. They thought he was a spirit, and our Lord calmed their fears by saying, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and

my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have' (Luke 24:38–39).

Marvellous words, aren't they? — for he was now in resurrection. They stand in contrast to what the apostles thought, for they thought he was a spirit. 'It's I myself; touch me, and see. I'm not just a spirit,' says Christ, from which you perceive that to be himself he had to have a body. It is the astonishing doctrine of Christianity that our blessed Lord, who in the beginning was with the Father — preincarnate Word and not human — having become human, not only had a body in the time before Calvary, but now in his risen glory has a body still. That is fantastically glorious and beyond our wildest conceptions. He has a human body still, and one day we shall have a body like his.

I know that old age, if not other things, tempts you to look with something less than admiration on your body. You feel, as Paul put it, that at best it is only a tent and easily collapsible, and one day the winds or the frosts or something will batter it down.

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling. (2 Cor 5:1–2)

You look forward to the day, as Peter did, when you can step outside your 'tent' and go home to be with the Lord. 'Since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me' (2 Pet 1:14).

You say, 'Will that not be better than being in my present body?'

It will indeed, my brother, my sister, 'to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord', which is very, very far better (see Phil 1:23). I grant you that because Scripture says so; but it shouldn't obscure the fact in our thinking that to be out of the body and present with the Lord is not the final state, nor the ideal state of the believer. The ideal state is not to be unclothed but eventually to be clothed upon with our habitation that is from heaven (see 2 Cor 5:3–4). God's work shall not be complete until the work of redemption is finished, and that will include, as his great masterpiece and finale, our being made like the glorious body of the Lord Jesus.

I must observe what I should have observed at the beginning, that the human body comes in two forms, male and female. If only I had been thoughtful enough to be politically correct in my vocabulary, I shouldn't have dared to phrase the basic question, 'What is man?' — I should have thought out something difficult, but my brain wouldn't go to it!

'What is man and woman?' would have sounded a little bit odd, wouldn't it? So, maybe, 'What is a human?' Well, do you know, I've not had time to learn the modern language and I really would prefer that my sisters would bear with an ancient like me if I use the Old English generic term, 'What is man?'

I notice that in the Hebrew of the Old Testament God speaks like that: 'When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created' (Gen 5:1–2). That is, the name of the man and the woman together was 'Adam', which is Hebrew for man. So when I say that man comes in two forms, you ladies won't take insult, will you? Man comes in two forms — his body

comes in two forms, male and female. And greatly daring with some, I suppose, I'm going to advance the thesis that that too is a permanent form of what it means to be human.

Do I hear someone say, 'Now, it's so early to wander into heresy, Mr Lecturer! Do you not remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that in heaven they that are counted worthy of that age are like the angels: they neither marry nor are given in marriage? How can you say that the distinctions, male and female, will survive into eternity?

And Jesus said to them, 'The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage'. (Luke 20:34–35)

I do accept and believe with all my heart that they won't marry or be given in marriage. I stand to correction, but I should find it very difficult myself to think that the differences between male and female are merely for the purposes of maintaining the human race. In my understanding of these things, that would be a very low view of the difference between male and female.

Our brains are part of our bodies, and a great deal of our psychology will depend on our brains. Are you telling me that the beauty, the gracefulness of the female form, so marvellously contrived of God to express the female personality, is merely a *temporary* something and will be lost in eternity?⁵ Are you going to tell me that the manly form, suited to those attitudes and qualities that are particularly male, is merely a *temporary* something that shall be lost in the eternal world?

Well, think it if you must; convince me if you feel you should; but I want to suggest, while I have the liberty, that these essential parts of the human body as we now know them shall most certainly survive into eternity.

How differently on times our blessed Lord spoke to women from how he spoke to men. On the road to Emmaus he called them fools, because they hadn't read and understood properly. Faced with Mary in the garden, he didn't begin by calling her a fool. Nor did he necessarily give her a long theological diatribe, but he spoke to Mary in ways that were suited to her feminine personality. In my understanding, what our Lord did here on earth, recognizing in his ministry these lovely differences that he has made, he will most surely do for all eternity.

What does it mean to be truly human?

Now let's come to our topic for tonight, 'What does it mean to be human?' It means that, as an integral part of his personality, man has a body, and that body can be either male or female. I shall not need to remind you that, as a result of the fall, this basic fact—that a human body can be male or female—has led to many perversions. On the one side, human beings have gone to extremes of *permissiveness* and *immorality* until they use their bodies sometimes as if they were mere animals, which is a peculiar mark perhaps of our own generation.

⁵ See [Question Two](#), p. 89.

A handy name for the other extreme would be *asceticism*, that has come to regard the human body as something basically bad, unhealthy and unspiritual. It is equally as perverse as the other extreme. Sometimes it has troubled the church, as people in their desire to be godly and holy and spiritual have picked up heathen ideas, and therefore have regarded marriage and married love as something unhealthy and positively sinful. They have encouraged people to think that if you really want to be spiritually minded you must avoid marriage, and those who manage to do so belong to a special deluxe super-duper range of Christians. That is both nonsense and, in the end, evil.

So tonight, as we study together 1 Corinthians 5–7 and note its leading ideas, we shall find that Paul is aiming to correct false ideas and false practices with regard to the human body. In chapters 5 and 6 he is basically correcting the one extreme of permissiveness and immorality, and then in chapter 7 he goes to the other extreme and tries to protect the believers at Corinth from asceticism: despising the body and despising marriage.

Let's follow the argument as best we can, picking out its chief points.

Chapter 5

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. (5:1)

The ancient Greeks were much given to immorality. It would have surprised a Greek that fornication was wrong; he never thought it was wrong. If you thought it was and wanted him to think so, you would have to tell him it was wrong. So in this letter, written to Christians at Corinth, Paul has to tell the believers that sexual sin is wrong. It would be an insult to you, who are senior Christians, if here tonight I laboured the point that it is wrong; but you had to do that with the early believers who were Greeks, because they never imagined that sexual immorality was wrong.

I fear, my brothers and sisters, that we shall have to begin saying it in public now, because of the tidal wave of permissiveness in our schools and in society generally. There are young believers these days who don't necessarily think that sexual immorality is wrong.

But the Corinthians were guilty of an immorality that would have shocked even pagan Greeks, that a man should have his father's wife as his own wife. The trouble was that not only had one of them committed this sin, but the Corinthians were arrogant about it (v. 2). You will gather from this epistle that they were arrogant about a lot of things. Presumably they were arrogant about this because they regarded it as a point of Christian freedom. They weren't judgmental; they were Christian. They were free; they weren't under the law. Salvation is free, isn't it? We don't get into heaven because of our good behaviour; we get there through the blood of Christ. They were free, they said, and what did a bit of immorality matter now and again? So they were arrogant, regarding it as a sign of their Christian spirituality and liberty and freedom that they could commit this kind of sin if they wished to.

Very quickly Paul calls them to book, and brings them to the answer. He insists that the church must exercise godly discipline and excommunicate the person that has sinned in this fashion (vv. 1–5). Why? For a number of reasons.

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (vv. 6–8)

If the Corinthians were arrogant and glorying in their freedom, then it was very apposite to remind them from the Old Testament of the ancient Passover. Passover was the feast in which they celebrated God's liberation of his people. They once had been slaves, and through the blood of the Passover lamb they were free.

Did they not remember that when Israel were free, liberated, redeemed from Egypt, it was laid down that, from the very moment of their liberation, they had to celebrate the feast of unleavened bread? So closely were they intertwined that you couldn't keep the Passover feast unless you were prepared to keep the feast of unleavened bread.

And what was true of Israel is true of us at the higher level. We have been redeemed by the blood of the Passover lamb, set free from the wrath of God, free from the domination of Satan and sin.

So what did the Corinthians mean by *freedom*? Allowing themselves to commit such immorality is not freedom. It's falling once more under the ruin and wreckage and disgrace and bondage of servitude. There is no salvation that says we can be delivered from the wrath of God and it doesn't matter if we go on living immorally. There is no such gospel. And if we imagine that it doesn't really matter if we commit fornication, then somewhere along the line we have misunderstood the gospel.

Why must they excommunicate?

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. (vv. 9–11)

These verses indicate that they must do it socially, presumably to make it very clear to the non-Christian community that the church disapproved of this behaviour and indicated by their discipline that this was not Christianity. Think of the damage to the gospel at Corinth, if they had allowed such shocking immorality in the church. The next time they preached in the streets, 'You must be born again; you ought to be saved and redeemed', what would the Greeks say? 'Do we really? If that's how you can carry on in your group, why should we need to be saved?'

Discipline has to be done, not for some narrow-minded reason but for the very honour and truth and definition of *what the gospel is that the church stands for*. How shall we ever bring the world to repentance if any member of a church is a known public adulterer?

All down the centuries there have been objections, and still are in some Christian circles, that we oughtn't to be judgmental. That is perfectly true: discipline must be done with broken

hearts and tear-filled eyes. But some of the objections against discipline have been false, haven't they?

People have said, 'Did not our Lord tell a parable about the wheat and the weeds?' (Matt 13:24–30, 36–43).

A man planted wheat and an enemy came and planted weeds. The servants came along and said, 'Do you want us to root up the weeds?' And the master said, 'No, don't root them up yet, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until harvest, and then we'll deal with them.'

'That's the true attitude to take in the church,' they say. 'You must never try to excommunicate anybody, because that would be judgmental, and who are you to decide who are the wheat and tares? The divine recipe is that we allow both to grow together in the church until harvest.'

Saint Augustine was of that frame of mind. Many have followed him, and justify churches that are a mixture of believers and unbelievers, of holy and absolutely profane.

But the objection doesn't stand, for there is a very important difference between what our Lord said in the parable, and what Paul is saying here. In the parable the field is not the church; it is the world. And the workers who were eventually to root up the weeds are not elders in a church, nor the church members; they are the angels (v. 41). The purpose of their rooting up the weeds was that they should be put into the fiery furnace and destroyed, for that parable is talking about the ultimate end of the wicked to be consigned to the lake of fire and to perdition.

Paul is talking about a very different thing; not the world. The people whom he is calling on to root out this offender are not angels, but members of the church (1 Cor 5:13). And the point of the excommunication is not so that the offender shall be cast into the lake of fire. It is the very opposite way round—it's to save him from ever getting there. To save him, 'so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord' (v. 5). If he cannot be brought to repentance over his sin by any other means, then for his own sake, and for his final salvation's sake, he must be disciplined. Sin against the human body of this order is not only sin; *it is a denial of the Christian gospel.*

Chapter 6

Paul starts off by talking about what seems on the surface to be another matter altogether. He suddenly says:

When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? (vv. 1–2)

You might think at first sight that Paul is a bad preacher. Like the one standing before you, he's liable to go off at a tangent and forget what he was talking about and start some other unrelated topic. Not here.

The touch word is the word 'judge'. He's just rebuked them in Corinth that they had not been diligent to judge this evil practice; and with that thought in his mind it occurs to him that

in another area the Corinthians were all too ready to judge. It's marvellous how we have our selections of sin. We choose to regard some sins as not all that important and some as very important.

They were haling one another to the law courts: Christian striving against Christian before the ungodly. And once more Paul seriously rebukes them. First of all, why does he do that? *Because it is a contradiction of the gospel.* What has that got to do with the gospel? These were business matters: what have business matters to do with the gospel? Like one man I heard of who, being challenged by another Christian for telling a lie, said, 'But it was a business lie.' Oh dear.

Choosing to suffer wrong

Don't you believe that the gospel includes not merely that you were forgiven when you trusted Christ, but one day the Lord shall come, your body shall be changed to be like his glorious body, and you shall reign with him? Do you believe that? And reigning with Christ, you'll judge the world and judge angels (v. 3). Would you be qualified to judge an angel? You know the difference between right and wrong. Sometimes these things get a bit more complicated than just knowing the difference between right and wrong, but at least you know that. We are told that the church shall judge angels.

If that's part of our gospel, is it credible that in the church at Corinth there was not one man wise enough to settle a business dispute between two members of the church? Suppose there wasn't, 'Why not rather suffer wrong?' says Paul (v. 7).

You say, 'This is impossible. I mean, it's all right to be saved, but we're not called to suffer wrong, are we?'

Yes, we are. Didn't you know that was in the gospel?

Talking to the slaves, Peter told them that, if need be, they were to put up with beatings for Christ's sake, 'for to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps' (1 Pet 2:21). Called to what? Called to follow the Saviour.

According to the gospel, how were you saved? You were saved because Christ was prepared to suffer for you. 'For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God' (1 Pet 3:18). He did it without complaint, without reviling and without threatening (2:23). Isn't it so? If Christ had insisted on having his 'pound of flesh' out of me, where should I have been? But he put up with it and he died for me, somehow managing to respect me still. That's the gospel, and in accepting that gospel, my brother, my sister, we are called to follow his steps, and where necessary to suffer as he suffered.

Choosing not to do wrong

'Now, not only are you not prepared to suffer,' Paul says, 'you positively do wrong; you do injustice to your fellow Christian.'

Being an academic, who all his life has lived in ivory towers knowing nothing of the world, I am tempted to say things about businessmen. But I know if I did they would point their fingers back at me, so I have to restrain my speaking. If you do injustice to your fellow

believer, why is that wrong? Why is it serious? In business, it is a 'dog-eat-dog' world. But wait a minute, what about the gospel?

Well, you know the old story, that when Israel was redeemed out of Egypt through the blood of the Passover lamb and kept the feast of unleavened bread, they started to journey. What for? They were journeying towards an inheritance flowing with milk and honey (Exod 3:8). That was all part of the gospel wasn't it?

In that same way, when we were redeemed with the blood of Christ, we were 'born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading' (1 Pet 1:3-4). It is an essential part of the gospel we have believed. Don't you believe that there is this great inheritance lying ahead in all its undefinable beauty? And what shall make that heaven, heaven? Not just a golden street; it'll be the way the people behave that will make it heaven.

How are you going to behave in heaven?

'I'm going to shine like a saint when I get there,' says someone. 'I shall really be on my best behaviour then.'

You won't go around stealing any of the gold off the streets, or cutting a corner in the silver and surreptitiously taking some of the jewels that belong to your neighbour?

'No, not there. I'm going to be like the Lord when I'm there. But this is different.'

Is it really? So it's okay if you behave now like the world behaves, is it?

You say, 'Mr Preacher, I've been told that salvation is by grace. Entry into the inheritance does not depend on how I behave.'

You've got it absolutely right: it is by grace. And what does that mean? Can you say, therefore, 'I'm saved by grace, so I'm looking forward to the day when I get home to heaven—I'm going to behave beautifully when I get there, but I'm not prepared to behave like that now; not just yet'?

So, do you want to behave like Christ, or don't you want to behave like Christ? You can't have it both ways. One day we shall be like him, 'And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure' (1 John 3:3). That is a fact, not an exhortation; and if a man doesn't purify himself, it could be that he doesn't have the hope, couldn't it?

False freedom, false love, false asceticism⁶

Now we get back to what you may recognize is the question with which we started. It is the Corinthians' false idea of freedoms. From 6:12 to the end of that chapter, Paul deals with what seem to me to be two expressions of freedom, such as the Corinthians might well have fastened on to: two concepts of freedom which were in themselves perhaps true, but they were making the wrong deductions from them.

1. *"All things are lawful for me", but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me", but I will not be enslaved by anything.* (1 Cor 6:12)

Yes, we are not under law but we are under grace.

'So I can do anything I like, then?'

⁶ For false asceticism see [next talk](#).

No you can't.

'Why not?'

Because, while all things might be lawful, they are not beneficial. And, more than that, I will not be brought under the power of any. You see, we must never confuse things. When it comes to the penalty of sin, that's been paid by the Lord Jesus. There is no penalty for a believer in Christ, no condemnation. Every believer is legally quit, accepted for Christ's sake. But the penalty of sin is one thing, the consequence of sin is another. 'Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey', says Paul (Rom 6:16). If I constantly do it, believer or not, it will make a slave of me.

What's the good of my saying, 'I'm free to do what I like', and I then proceed to indulge in some practice that by its very nature in the end enslaves me? *We are free from the penalty of sin; we are not yet free from its consequences.*

'Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap' (Gal 6:7). If a believer sows weeds in his garden, it's no good saying, 'I'm a believer, so God will wave a magic wand over it and it will come up beautiful flowers'. No, if you sow weeds you'll get weeds, believer or no believer. If we engage in immoralities and self-indulgences of various kinds, they can make slaves of us.

2. *"Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other.' (1 Cor 6:13)*

This is the next thing they said, and there was a certain amount of truth in it. When our Lord himself discussed the food laws, he said to the Pharisees that food goes into the stomach and out: 'It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person' (Matt 15:11). How perfectly true.

Firstly, it might be true that 'food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food', and it's only a temporary arrangement that we shall need when we're down here on earth and eventually God will do away with both the food and the stomach. Then we shan't have to get the breakfast anymore! That may be true, but what were you wanting to deduce from it?

'Well, immorality just involves a different part of the body, that's all. It's one of these earthly appetites. It's neither here nor there, like food is neither here nor there. When the Lord comes, all that part of our anatomy will be destroyed and done away with, so this is merely for time and it doesn't matter how you behave.'

Paul comes down on that misapprehension like a thunderclap:

The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. (6:13-14)

Perhaps the stomach and so on will be done away with one day, but the body itself is not a temporary thing. The Lord Jesus died and God raised him again. His body is an eternal thing, and God shall raise up our bodies too. *Our bodies are not temporary things.*

Secondly, food for the stomach is a way of keeping your body alive in the present, but what is the body for? 'The human body,' says Paul, 'is for the Lord.' That's what the body is for. It is now and ever shall be. What an awesomely marvellous thing that is. It's not merely

that when I get home, my glorified body will be for the Lord, but by his grace my poor old body even now is for the Lord.

Now listen to this stupendous bit of gospel: ‘Do you not know that your *bodies are members of Christ?*’ (v. 15)⁷. It’s not just that in the Body of Christ I have a spiritual gift, and as a spiritual gift I’m a member of Christ; but by the amazing condescension of our blessed Lord, my body as it is now is a member of Christ. It’s for him. Young Christian, can you get hold of it? I scarcely can, after all my years. *My body is a member of Christ, designed to be for him.*

Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as ‘casual sex’. It involves the uniting of two human bodies.

Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, ‘The two will become one flesh’. But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. (vv. 15–18)

‘Sins against his own body’ is a difficult phrase. I take it to mean that all other sins do not affect the purpose for which the body was made. Sexual immorality does.

Let me illustrate it

One of these days, with your great generosity of heart, you decide to give me a Rolls Royce, fit for the Queen to ride in.

I say, ‘Thank you very much. I can’t believe it’s true. I shall be up first thing every morning to see the thing.’

‘I should like a ride in it myself now and again,’ you say.

‘You can have a ride in it any day of the week.’

But I’m a shiftless kind of a fellow. I don’t put the best grade petrol in it and I fill it up full of oil and mess up the innards. I don’t keep the tyres pumped up or take it for its regular service. The poor old thing isn’t going as it ought to, but at least I’ve kept the purpose of it quite clear—it’s for riding me about the town. So I’ve not treated it too well, but the purpose still remains.

Suppose one of these days you come to visit me, and say, ‘Where’s the Rolls Royce? I notice it’s not in your garage, where is it?’

‘Come and see. I’ve got it in the back garden.’

‘Why have you got it in the back garden?’

‘Well, you see, I’ve got these two beautiful dogs, and the kennel was getting a bit small for them, so I thought if I put the Rolls Royce right next to the kennel and cut a bit out of the side of the Rolls Royce, the dogs can still eat their bones in the kennel and there’s more room for them to play. So I’m using the Rolls Royce.’

I’ll omit what you would say! That’s a different thing from putting in cheap petrol, isn’t it? Now I have perverted the very purpose for which the Rolls Royce was made. What a sad thing: it’s a sin against the Rolls Royce itself.

⁷ See [Question Three](#), p. 89.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (vv. 19–20)

We're designed as a temple for God's Holy Spirit to dwell in, and we are not our own. After God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt and saved the firstborn in the nation by the blood of the lamb, he claimed the firstborn for himself. They were no longer their own.

If they objected, Moses would have answered simply, 'You ought to have stayed in Egypt then'.

'If I'd stayed in Egypt I would have perished.'

'Quite so. How do you manage to be alive now?'

'Because I sheltered under the blood.'

And Moses would say, 'Doesn't that mean, then, that you wouldn't have the life you now have except for the blood of the lamb?'

And the parable comes to our hearts. We are not our own, we were bought with a price and our very body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. We are members of Christ, made for the Lord. What a sad, sad, sad thing it would be, if I so perverted the purpose of my body that I took a member of Christ and by fornication joined it to the body of a prostitute.

God help us and so infuse our minds and hearts with the staggering wonder, not only of his creation of our human bodies, but the even more staggering wonder of the redemption of our bodies and the indescribable glory that the Lord gives to them when he says he made and redeemed them for himself, to be a temple for him.

May God help us and so suffuse our hearts by his grace, that, in spite of our weakness, we might learn to glorify God in our bodies.

Shall we pray.

Lord, now we thank thee for thy word. Thou hast said enough to us, Lord, that we should come quietly back to thy word ourselves and, between thee and us, each one think for himself and herself of these important and wonderful things.

Lord Jesus, by thy redeeming blood, we pray, help us to glorify thee in our bodies, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Man in Relation to God

A Question of Loyalty

What it means to be human

These sessions are for hard work, and therefore without further apology let's proceed. We have some unfinished business to do. I'd like us to think a little bit more about what it means to be human, in the sense that the physical body is an integral part of what it means to be human.⁸

In chapters 5 and 6, as we saw in the first session, Paul is dealing with one wrong extreme, the extreme of permissiveness and immorality — false freedom and false love.

Chapter 7

False asceticism

In chapter 7 he goes to the other side of the question, and what he is dealing with is the extreme of asceticism. I want to spend a few moments in this session pointing that out, because it is important to grasp the nature of his logical argument and what he is trying to do in this chapter. He is not just sitting down with a blank sheet, writing the Christian view of marriage; he is writing largely to correct a wrong idea of marriage that existed among some of the believers in Corinth. Allow me to point out what is shown by the way he argues. For instance,

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: 'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.' But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. (1 Cor 7:1-2)

'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. *But . . .*' — do notice that. So the first statement, 'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman', is by way of being a concession. On the other hand, it is an idea that has immediately to be qualified. It is good in certain circumstances and with certain people (v. 2), and with that 'but' Paul proceeds with several other verses to put the other side of the question.

To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. (vv. 8-9)

⁸ See p. 26: '[2. Man in relation to his body and to marriage \(chs. 5-7\)](#)'.

'To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am.' 'Admittedly, it's good,' says Paul, 'But . . .' — and then he proceeds to put the other side of the question.

That is the first point. In chapter seven he is still dealing with the topic of the human body, the fact that it is male and female. So, now he corrects the one-sided view of the ascetics: 'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman' (v. 1). In saying so, he is somewhat different from traditional Judaism. The rabbi is taught that the first commandment in the Bible to Adam and Eve is to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Gen 1:28), and some of them used to say that if a man doesn't get married and remains a bachelor he is breaking the first commandment in the Bible. If that's all the Bible had to say, you would see that sense was on their side, wouldn't you?

Christianity says that, in certain circumstances and for some people, it is good not to get married. Our Lord himself indicated that there are some to whom this is given, and for the sake of the kingdom of God they remain unmarried (Matt 19:10–12). It is good therefore for them. But that must immediately be followed by the other side of the question, for the gift of remaining single is not given to everybody. If God hasn't given you the gift to remain single, then it could be a perilous thing to try and live a celibate life. That can lead to all kinds of temptations and fallings, and sometimes to *a disgrace upon the gospel itself*.

It is the normal thing to get married, yet Paul wrote: 'I wish that all were as I myself am' (1 Cor 7:7). We do not know whether he wrote these words when he was a bachelor, or if he had been married in earlier life and his wife had died; or, indeed, when he was converted his wife had left him. He 'suffered the loss of all things', you may remember (Phil 3:8). So we don't know his exact status, but at the time he wrote he had no wife, for he says, 'I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.' This knocks on the head the false idea that somehow marriage is rather less, and not so spiritual; and certainly it reproves the notion that marriage and married love is something bad. That is not so.

We shall not stay to consider the verses that talk about those practical things, but let us notice again what he says in verse 7: 'I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.' God has one gift for some, one gift for others: one gift to remain single, one gift to be married, and they are both God given gifts. The word he uses for gift, *chárisma*, is the word that we shall meet again when we come to the famous chapters 12–14 of this epistle, where the *charísmata* are the spiritual gifts. It is marvellous that we have spiritual gifts given to us by God, but Paul does not hesitate here to use the very same word as he uses for spiritual gifts to describe marriage on the one hand, and celibacy on the other.

It is a gift of God to be married; and not to be thrown back in his face as though it were some second rate thing, or not quite decent. Marriage and all that it involves is a *chárisma*, a gift from God, and not everybody has the same gift. Paul had the gift, therefore, of living as a single man. He would like all people to be like himself for certain reasons; but it's not for him to decide, it is according to the gift that God has given.

Some were widows and some never had a husband. Paul says that it is good for them not to marry or remarry; but for some that would be impossible, because God hasn't given them

that gift and they don't have the necessary physical self-control. 'Therefore let them get married,' he says, and follows with practical advice that we shall not look into this evening.

Living the life to which God has called us

Let's come now down to verse 17, where once more he deals with general principles:

Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.

When we come to the question of God's calling, we are to consider what our situation in life was when God called us. Other things being equal, we are to remain in that calling. In other words, you don't have to change. It depends of course what your situation was. If you were a professional housebreaker, you would have to change!

A lot of things have to get changed when we become believers, but we're talking about this matter of the human body, and he gives some examples.

1. CIRCUMCISION (VV. 18–20)

Suppose a man is circumcised because he comes from a Jewish background, and now God calls him. He gets saved and learns that circumcision does not contribute one iota to salvation: to say you must be circumcised to be saved is to contradict the gospel. What is the man going to do? Must he take surgical steps to undo his circumcision, as some people did in the ancient world?

'No,' says Paul. 'It's neither here nor there. Remain as you are when God called you.'

2. SLAVERY (VV. 21–22)

We are all to be devoted to the Lord, and you can imagine a slave saying, 'Well, what am I to do now? I've got converted and I have learned that I'm not my own. I'm bought with the blood of Christ and I must be free to serve the Lord. That means I must run away and not be a slave any more.'

'No you mustn't,' says Paul, 'and you needn't. You are not your own, but you don't have to gain freedom from your slavery in order to serve the Lord. You can serve him as a slave. Hoeing potatoes in the field or whatever you do, it can be done as unto the Lord. In that you have freedom, because, even if physically you are a slave, you are perfectly free to do your slave work for the Lord, and from him you will get the recompense when he comes to reign.'

3. FREE PEOPLE (V. 22)

If you were a free person and not a slave when you were called, remember that in some sense you are a slave—you are the Lord's slave. So, whether we are physically slaves or physically free, there is this similarity.

'You are both servants of the Lord,' says Paul. There is a great sanity in Paul's attitude to these things. 'If you can be free, use it; but you don't have to be free from physical slavery in order to serve the Lord.'

You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God. (vv. 23–24)

'Abide with God' (KJV)—that's a lovely phrase, isn't it? Then he begins to talk about another matter.

Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgement as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. (vv. 25–27)

Sometimes husbands, Christian husbands at that, come to me and say, 'I wish, brother, I was like you'. I'm not going to split on them—so long as they turn up to the rest of the meetings! What they mean is that they'd like to be 'irresponsibly free' to serve the Lord. But they didn't get converted until they were married; now they can't undo it and it grieves them. It shouldn't do, should it? In the calling that you were in when you were converted, stay there. It is good to remain unmarried, but here it comes again:

But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. (v. 28)

Paul gives this advice in light of the peculiar circumstances of his own day: 'in view of the present distress' (v. 26). He doesn't say what the distress was; he leaves that to our imagination and we cannot be sure. It may have been that he saw the rising persecution that would come upon the believers, as indeed it did. Peter warned his fellow Christians in his first epistle about the fiery trial that was about to beset them (1 Pet 4:12). Paul is therefore giving his advice in light of these difficult circumstances that were now surrounding the believers, the present distress; and he says, 'In light of that it would be a good thing, if you're not married already, to remain single.'

We can think of all kinds of practical reasons why that should be so. For instance, a man who is responsible just for himself and faced with a trial for his faith and possible imprisonment; or if he's faced with a situation at work where he'll be out of a job if he confesses the Lord. It's easier for an irresponsible bachelor, but it's a very different thing if the man has got a wife and six children. So, it was because of 'the present distress'.

You could transfer it to other areas. If God calls you, my good brother, to be a missionary to a cannibal tribe in Papua New Guinea⁹ or somewhere, you might be wise to sit down and carefully ponder Paul's advice. Is it really sensible to get married and take your wife and the little children there, or even to leave your wife at home worried out of her skin every day of the week in case you have gone into the pot of some cannibal and are in the process of being eaten?

It might be more sensible not to get married; but you can't lay it down as a rule, not even for missionaries. If they get married they haven't sinned. Notice that in the greatness of God's heart he leaves the decision sometimes freely to us. 'If you do this you don't sin, if you do that you don't sin.' You must decide before the Lord.

⁹ 05.07.2012 *New Zealand Herald*: '[Cannibal cult members arrested in PNG](#)'.

Then Paul begins to generalize:

This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. (vv. 29–31)

Now the lesson becomes general to us all, married or unmarried, in business or not in business. The time for all of us is short. Whether you think of the interval between now and the Lord's coming, or of life itself, the time is short. And this certainly should alter our perspective. Married or not married, in business or not in business, no longer become the dominant concerns. How I might live to please the Lord becomes dominant, and how I may serve God to the best in my circumstances. That may mean adjustment in the home for husbands and wives, when they consider life's major objective.

The time is short. You can't do everything in life, and the overwhelming danger is that we get our perspectives wrong; instead of living primarily to serve the Lord in whatever circumstances God has placed us, we allow other things to become such necessities that they crowd out the service of the Lord.

We haven't the time for everything. This reminds me of when the Israelites came out of Egypt: the first reason why they had to eat unleavened bread was not particularly a spiritual one. The whole thing became spiritualized later on, and has served us as a very good spiritual lesson. But the first reason why they had to eat unleavened bread was that they came out in a hurry and they hadn't the time to bake leavened bread.

Amid the thunder and lightning, and all the commotion that was going on, it was no good Hezekiah saying, 'Where is my leavened bread?'

And his wife saying, 'Oh, my dear, I haven't had time to cook it.'

'But I always have leavened bread.'

'Yes, I know you do and I'll get you some as soon as we're out.'

'But I want it now. I always have leavened bread for breakfast.'

What! When you're at the beginning of this colossal thing in life, setting out for the great promised inheritance?

A present day illustration

That's like a man who's going on holiday with his wife. He's got one of these special super-duper holidays and they're going to the Sahara and to the Himalayas and I don't know where not all. So they're in the airport, and half an hour before the flight is called the husband thinks to himself, 'It's time we had lunch. I want fish and chips. Where can we get fish and chips?'

And his wife says, 'You can't get fish and chips here, we're going to be called in half an hour's time. We'll get something on the plane.'

'Will it be fish and chips?'

'No, it won't be fish and chips.'

'I always have fish and chips.'

'But you'll miss the plane.'

'I don't care.'

He's got to have his fish and chips, even if he misses the plane to go to the Sahara and the Himalayas.

You wouldn't do that, would you? Oh friend, we're started on God's great scheme. There's 'an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you' (1 Pet 1:4). If you have to go without your fish and chips, then go without them.

You say, 'What's wrong with fish and chips?'

'Nothing, but may God give us a sense of proportion in life.'

This little life will soon be gone and then the great eternity, and the time is short be you married or unmarried. God give us the grace not to let life's ordinary things become so predominant that they obscure life's main purpose, which is to get ready for the great inheritance ahead.

Paul talks about his motives

This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. (vv. 29-31)

Paul is not saying all this to put a lasso round their necks to stop them enjoying themselves. 'I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord' (v. 35). If we're going to serve the Lord, then there are proper and improper ways to do it. We have to be ready for the Lord's service, like a servant standing by his master's side, giving him our undivided devotion.

'Lord, I can't start yet. I must have my fish and chips!'

Is that any way for a servant to serve the Lord?

'Lord, I want to serve you, but I've got so many other interesting things to do.'

Do you really? They can't wait, but the Lord can?

I'm thinking how we may serve the Lord without distraction. Paul is not contradicting what he said earlier. Of course a husband and wife together can serve the Lord in some foreign field just as equally as a bachelor missionary, but all concerned will have to order their time and activity as to what is more important and what is less, so that they may serve the Lord without distraction. Take it from me, if from no one else, that includes bachelors as well.

In my travels I do see churches that have gone downhill, and I think it is sometimes that modern business puts such pressure on senior men that their service for God as elders in the church is a little bit hurried and unprepared. It gets done when they can do it. They wouldn't serve the head of income tax like it, let alone the Lord. God give us the grace to get our proportions right.

And then to the final verses:

If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly towards his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin. But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better. A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. Yet in my judgement she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God. (vv. 36–40)

Now these verses have created a grey puzzle of interpretation for commentators. I am going to give you what I think is their true meaning. I was perhaps wrong about certain things in the first session; here I'm probably wrong, but 'I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say' (10:15).

I personally think that here Paul is talking to a young man, not yet married but he's begun a friendship with a charming lady. He suddenly hears some emotional preacher calling upon him, as a redeemed child of God, that he ought to serve the Lord. Realizing that if he continues this friendship and actually gets married, then life's cares and responsibilities will limit him in what kind of thing he can do, compared with what would happen if he remained single.

So what must he do? *Must* he throw the girl over at once? Well, no, not necessarily. What he's got to do is to act once more in a proper fashion. Here's this good friendship; the girl has got it into her head that they're going to be married one day. He has developed her friendship and now he wants to ditch her against her will. Would that be proper? If the man comes to the opinion that this would be a very improper thing to do, unfair in the extreme, then Paul's advice is that they should marry. It's not sinful; he hasn't sinned, let them marry.

You will notice in this chapter how Paul is constantly rebuking the extremists in Corinth, who wanted to lay down rules and regulations far beyond what the law lays down.

On the other hand—here he comes again. '*But,*' says Paul, 'if you can remain single and you both decide that that is best for the Lord's work, and it's not improper and unfair to the girl concerned, then remain single. The one way is good; this for you would be better.' It is God who gives us the gift, isn't it? (v. 7).

Young folks, if I may talk to you for I was young once, here is a thing to be considered. As I travel in many mission fields, very often the question that rises in my heart is this, 'Where are the men?' There are single sisters all alone in countries of great danger and peril. Where are the men? Why aren't they there? Perhaps it is because some of them didn't face what Paul is saying here: they got married when perhaps they should have remained single. But I mustn't fall into the trap of laying down rules, of course not.

'I now speak by permission,' says Paul: "And I think that I too have the Spirit of God" (v. 40). 'I haven't any exact word of the Lord Jesus to quote to you, but I am entrusted, indeed inspired, to give you my judgment, as one upon whom God has had mercy and compassion. What I desire for you is not to keep you back from enjoyments and joys you could have had, but to help you to see what is the best way for you to enter that supreme joy of knowing that your life counts to its maximum for the Lord Jesus.'

These are highly practical things, and I am conscious of the fact that some of my younger brothers and sisters may be at that time in life when the field is still wide open. Oh, my brother, my sister, do seek seriously what God's will is for your life, so that you may embark on it in the assurance that it is God's will, and serve him in those circumstances to which he has called you. But make sure, lest when life is running to its end you should find yourself saying, 'I wish I had taken the other road. What I could have done for the Lord, but I missed it.'

3. Man in relation to God (chs. 8-10)

Danger: idolatrous disloyalty to God. Answer: the table of the Lord; God's jealousy

These chapters—the third major part of this epistle—are concerned, as are all the others, with the gospel and what it means to be human. They turn us back to the question of man in his relation to God.

In chapters 1–4 it was man in relation to God and the question of man's *confidence*. Is man's confidence in God, or misplaced in other things and people?

In chapters 5–7 it was man in relation to the human body and the question of man's *freedom*: false freedom, false love, false asceticism.

Now, as we come back to the topic of man in relation to God, it is not so much a question of man's confidence, but of man's *loyalty* to God. And if I can impress that on us all tonight, then I have done well.

When we meet chapters 8–10 they look at first sight to be rather uninviting and almost irrelevant. Paul is talking about the question of eating meat that has been offered to idols; a matter that vexed the early Christians, but of course doesn't vex you and me. We get our meat at the local supermarket and there's no question of it having been offered to idols. The matter doesn't arise. You don't keep an idol shelf in your lounge and so the whole question of idols is irrelevant, nothing to do with us.

Before we come to that alarming decision—that it is nothing whatsoever to do with us—let us observe what the question is. It is a question of *idolatry*. And what's wrong with idolatry? There is only one true God, but there are many little gods that try their best to compete with him, and number one absolutely fundamental condition of what it means to be human is that we should be loyal to God. If loyalty to him is compromised, then we are compromising the very basis of our existence. It is as serious as that.

You gather that from the Ten Commandments: 'You shall have no other gods before me . . . for I the LORD your God am a jealous God' (Exod 20:3, 5). You gather it from the very elementary statement of what's involved in conversion: 'You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God' (1 Thess 1:9). Far from being irrelevant, this is a very fundamental principle of our being human: loyalty to God.

Chapter 8

Was it all right to eat meat offered to idols?

When it came to this practical question, many of the Corinthians took the view that they knew the answer. It was simple. An idol is a bit of wood or stone or something, sitting there in its place. It's nothing, and if meat is offered in front of it, it doesn't do any harm to the meat.

There's nothing wrong in eating the meat offered to idols, and so far they were right. They knew the facts, but Paul from the outset warns them, 'Be careful; for knowing the facts is one thing, loving the Lord is another.'

Oh, my good friend, you can have your head full of theology and not really love the Lord. Some liberals have a head full of theology, but they're not loyal to God. The supreme thing is not just knowing the facts, for knowledge in that sense puffs up, but love edifies. 'If anyone loves God, he is known by God' (8:3).

Love and loyalty: see it work out in practice. If you have the freedom of conscience to eat meat offered to idols—very good, carry on. But here is a dear brother, perhaps converted out of heathendom, and to him an idol is a very powerful reality. He has a conscience therefore about eating meat offered to idols. You come along, and with your freedom you overpower him. You invite him to your dinner party. He is perhaps a timid kind of fellow and he doesn't want to offend you. You've got all this meat and he doesn't like to refuse it. In his heart of hearts, he feels it would be disloyal to the Lord to eat the meat, but he daren't object. You overpower him, and say, 'Oh, come on, eat it, man'. He eats it and all the while he has a conscience that says he's being disloyal to the Lord.

You make your fellow Christian do something that he believes in his heart is disloyal to the Lord, and whatever shall the poor man say when he comes before the Lord?

The Lord says to him, 'Why did you eat the meat? Did you think it was wrong?'

'Yes, Lord, I thought it was wrong.'

'Why did you eat it, then?'

'Well, Gooding said . . .'

Shall not the Lord with all his imperial dignity say, 'Who is Gooding?'

How can it be loyalty to the Lord on my part to influence a brother or sister to go against their conscience and do something they feel is disloyal to the Lord?

'Oh, but I've got my rights,' says someone. 'I'm free to eat the meat and I'm not going to have my freedom hemmed in by some little quirky believer like that.'

I see.

'Are you asking me to forego my rights?'

I haven't got far, if I don't yet realize that to forego my rights is one of the great privileges given to every child of God. If I develop the idea that I'm not going to give up my rights, it is in the end a very perilous thing.

Chapter 9

Paul cites his own example

'I have a right, you know, when I go around preaching, to be paid for it by the church. But I don't accept the money.'

Why not?

'Because I want to be able to *present the gospel free of charge*. When I go to these different places, if they're Jews, as far as I can, consistent with true Christianity, I live as a Jew. If they're Gentiles, I live as a Gentile. It may not be an enjoyable experience, but I do become as one with their culture.'

Why do you do that, Paul? Why don't you stand up for your own rights?

'Because I want to win the most people possible in the gospel, and if I stand on my cultural rights I shan't be able to win so many. I'm thinking of the day when I stand before Christ; how silly my little rights will look then. I want to see there the maximum number of people that I've won for the Lord as my eternal reward. And for that reason I give up my rights.'

'And I'll tell you another reason,' says Paul. 'It's a very dangerous attitude to stand on your rights. Before you're aware of it, it can so easily topple over into lack of discipline and self-indulgence, which is the slippery road that leads to sorrow. So I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest having preached to others I become so self-indulgent and live inconsistently in my private life, that I am in danger of being disqualified when it comes to the day of reward.'

Chapter 10

Our loyalty to God will be tested

And it comes home to our hearts, doesn't it? You see, idolatry is a much more subtle thing than you might think. Like Israel we are on a journey, and the thing they were constantly tested about was this: would they be loyal to God? Many of them failed the test. Be assured, my fellow believer, that on our journey home our loyalty to God too shall be tested.

'Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did' (v. 6). Desire is a very important part of our make-up; it is a very powerful motor. It's like those self-propelled rockets with a motor in them that enables them to follow the target. Wherever it moves to, they follow the target until they are drawn right on to it. So it is with desire.

Desire God and his things, lay up your treasure in heaven so that it really gets hold of your heart, and the very desire pulls you to heaven and to God. Desire unworthy things and those desires will pull you to them. 'You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons' (v. 21).

On their way from Egypt the Israelites got tired of the manna. It became breakfast, lunch, tea, dinner and supper. 'This manna! We remember the cucumbers and the garlic that we had in Egypt?' (It's a pity they didn't remember the taskmasters as well.) They lusted after evil things, so you mustn't be surprised that when they got to the promised land they found they hadn't got a taste for it, and refused to go in.

My dear brother and sister, do you suppose you're going to enjoy heaven when you get there? Have you really got a taste for heaven and for God? If you do, *it will come out in your taste now*. 'Beware of your desires,' says Paul. 'Uncontrolled desires and standing on your rights will pull you back into this evil world instead of pulling you up to God and the glorious inheritance.'

Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.' (10:6-7)

THE GOLDEN CALF

You will remember that Israel were on their journey, and when they came to Sinai God put a proposition to them.

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel. (Exod 19:5–6)

‘I brought you to myself. Now, if you’ll obey my voice, you’ll be my peculiar treasure and a kingdom of priests to me’ (see vv. 5–6 KJV). ‘And what is more,’ says God, ‘if you’ll have it, I will come and dwell with you in the tabernacle, which I should like you to make. Would you like that?’

They said, ‘Yes, Lord. We’d like that very much.’

‘All right,’ says God, ‘I’ll get Moses to come up the mountain. I’ll give him the model to follow to make the tabernacle so that I can come and dwell among you and walk with you on your road to your great inheritance’ (see Exod 24:18.)

They said that was jolly good. So they sat at the bottom of the mountain. A week went by, and sometime later, I don’t know when it was, someone said, ‘Have you noticed what a funny position we’re in? Here we are in the middle of the wilderness, sitting at the bottom of a mountain, getting nowhere fast.’

‘But Moses has gone up the mountain,’ says someone else.

‘Yes, I know he’s gone up there, but we can’t see him. He had no means of support when he went up; he could have been eaten by a mountain leopard or something.’

‘But he’s coming again.’

‘They said that about three weeks ago and he hasn’t come back yet. You can’t have thousands of folks sitting around at the bottom of a mountain getting nowhere, twiddling their thumbs and life going by.’

‘What do you suggest?’

‘Do you want an aim in life?’

‘Yes, we do.’

So they all got round Aaron and said, ‘Look here Aaron. We’ve had enough of this Moses. We don’t know what’s happened to him; and the God he represents, well, who knows? And all this business of an inheritance out there that none of us has ever seen, we want a different goal to aim at. “Make us gods who shall go before us”’ (32:1).

You’ve got to have something going before you, haven’t you? You’ve got to aim at something in life, otherwise you’d go round in circles getting nowhere.

They didn’t know what particular kind of a god they would like to aim at, so Aaron said, ‘Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me’ (v. 2).

So they got the earrings and made a god out of them. That’s a very funny thing to aim at isn’t it—earrings? But you should understand that in the ancient world, where there were no banks, people put their spare cash into golden ornaments and wore them on their persons. It represented life’s financial potential, and now they made it a god that they would follow.

God nearly destroyed the whole lot of them. 'They don't want me. They can have the gold.' It was through Moses's interjection that they were spared, many of them, but it was a near disaster (vv. 7-14).

These things are written as examples for us (1 Cor 10:6)

What are my goals in life? Are they set by love for the Lord and loyalty to him? Is that my chief concern in my job and in my home, or could it be that sometimes lesser ambitions take the place that only God should have?

May God, who knows the heart, help me. How often must I say, 'Lord, you know at least that I meant to love you'? But it's so easy to wander and to have misplaced goals. If loyalty to God is the basic thing of what it means to be truly human and truly redeemed, may God help us to love him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, so that throughout our pilgrimage the desires of our heart may keep our compass needle firmly on God. Then he will bring us without regret through the desert and home to the glory that lies beyond.

Shall we pray.

Oh God, we thank thee for thy word; for the joy of studying it and the opportunity to do so in freedom. As we go, we praise thee for our redemption and the magnificence of thy grace.

Help us now, we beseech thee, for these things are so easily said. Grant us, Lord, to live consistently. And herein is all our hope—not only the reality of the inheritance that lies ahead, but the magnificent wonder that thou, blessed Lord Jesus, hast deigned to dwell even in our bodies. Be thou, Lord, our life's glory here, so leading us to the glory that lies beyond. For thy name's sake. Amen.

Man in Relation to Christ, his Head

A Question of Loyalty (1)

Our study tonight will find the pattern that we have observed in previous weeks repeating itself, for we shall be obliged to consider some more mistakes, faults and misbehaviours on the part of the believers at Corinth. We shall do it sombrelly and I trust with humble hearts, remembering that we shall have to meet them, and considering ourselves also lest we should be tempted to misbehave as they misbehaved. It's one of the advantages of not being in the first rank of Christians, that we can profit not only from the good example of those who went before, but also from their mistakes and how those mistakes were put right.

As we have observed on previous occasions, Paul does not correct them simply by quoting a specific rule from the Christian handbook. What he does is to put right their mistakes by calling them *back to the basic Christian gospel*, pointing out how their mistaken behaviour conflicts with the glorious wonders and the basic principles of our great Christian salvation procured for us by Jesus Christ our Lord. So that, as we consider their mistakes and then the way they are corrected, I trust we shall come to a firmer grip on the great doctrines of the Christian gospel and our hearts will rejoice as we consider its glory.

And then of course, once more it will raise in our minds one of our major themes in this epistle. We have called it *The Christian Philosophy of Man*, meaning, according to Christianity, *what is man?* What does it mean to be really human? And since this is a Christian epistle we must add not merely what does it mean to be human, but what does it mean to be a redeemed human being? And then again, since human beings are male and female, we shall be asking what it means to be a Christian man and what it means to be a Christian woman.

That's not the same thing as being a man and a woman. As the age advances and the two things coincide more and more, we shall be asking not simply, 'What does it mean to be a man and a woman?' but, 'What does it mean to be *a Christian man and a Christian woman*; and how are the two related?'

The specifically Christian plan of redemption

We shall find something strangely wonderful as now we begin to put these things in the context of chapters 11–15. For Christians, redemption means something exceedingly special. It is not a question merely of receiving forgiveness, and not simply a matter of being justified by faith. Abraham was forgiven and he was justified by faith; but Abraham himself knew very little of the things that we shall be talking of this evening.

In Christian redemption man and woman are not simply brought back to the state in which Adam and Eve were when they were first created and placed in the garden of Eden. Beautiful and glorious as they were, there's something more wonderful than being restored to Eden's perfection. Christian redemption involves nothing less than a completely new kind of human being; a new human race and the creation of a *new entity*, the likes of which never existed in God's universe before. That entity is called the Body of Christ and it involves a *new regime*, the like of which Abraham knew nothing about.

Let's see how those things are presented, as we take a bird's-eye view of these five chapters. We'll take them in reverse order; therefore we'll take number 6 first.

6. Man in relation to Christ, the Second Man: Man's true evolution (ch. 15)

Danger: denial of the resurrection of the body. Answer: back to the gospel

There was the first Adam; there is the second and last Adam. The second and last Adam is our blessed Lord Jesus Christ himself. He was not just a perfect edition of what Adam was originally and should have continued to be; there is an infinitely large difference. 'The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven' (v. 47). 'The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit' (v. 45).

The first man was made a living soul (KJV) and could transmit his physical life to his progeny. The second man, though truly man, is not just a living soul; the second man is a life-giving spirit. It is true to say that our blessed Lord Jesus is truly human: he is a real human being. But it wouldn't be true to say he is *only* human, and here is a thing to warm our hearts and fill them with wonder as we begin our session tonight. Happy are those people who have met with Jesus Christ, who is a life-giving spirit. As he stood here, a man amongst men, he said:

For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will
 . . . For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.
 (John 5:21, 26)

So the Lord Jesus imparts spiritual life to whom he will, and he has life *in himself*. We human beings don't: we got our life from our parents, and they from their parents, and thus all down the channels of life. None of us has life in himself, and one day we shall depart our physical frames. The blessed Lord Jesus—the man Jesus, had life in himself, and as the source of life he is able to impart eternal life to all who trust him.

What a gospel message that is for us little human creatures here tonight. And for me more than for you, because you look in the bloom of your youth and the decay of the old brain cells and the enlargement of the arthritic knees hasn't troubled you yet. It will do presently; if not before the end of the meeting, then later! And then you will bless God that ever you met Jesus Christ our Lord, the man who is not only sinless, over whom death had no claim, but a man who, when you meet him and trust him, can impart to you now the very life of God, eternal life.

He is a life-giving spirit, and not only can he now impart that eternal life to all who trust him, but another wonder is announced. He is now risen from the dead; human still, but with

a transformed and glorified body. And just as we have borne the image of the old earthly body—the body we got originally from Adam, one day we shall bear the image of the heavenly (see 15:49).

Like Paul, it would almost make you impatient to have it; but your earthly body isn't worn out yet, so you don't feel that way. But there is the beginning of a longing, isn't there? A kind of a wistfulness, such as perhaps a butterfly still in the chrysalis might feel, if it heard a rumour that it didn't have to be always inside this thing, hanging upside-down on a branch, scarcely knowing what it was. If, like the butterfly, you heard a rumour that one day you would be transformed into a thing of radiant beauty and ascend the heavens, the very longing of it might work in you what it worked in Paul when he said, 'it's okay to be here in the body, but I have a longing—not escapism—a longing, implanted by the Holy Spirit, to be absent from the body and present with the Lord, and then to have my glorious eternal habitation, which is from God, the body of glory in heaven.'

So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. (2 Cor 5:6–8)

God is not content just to forgive us our sins and put us back where Adam was before he sinned. He will take the occasion of human sin to do something breathtakingly new and wonderful. That is God and his plan for redemption: a new kind of human race.

5. Man in relation to the Body of Christ (chs. 12–14)

Danger: infringement of love. Answer: a new entity

Come backwards now to chapters 12–14. Before that day of glory there has already come into existence a new entity, such as never was before in the whole of God's universe. It must have been a startling thing for the archangel Gabriel to observe the ascension of the Lord Jesus, to see what heaven had never witnessed before: a resurrected human body, a real body, a tangible body in heaven. I wonder what Michael said to Gabriel on the day of Pentecost. I think these angels must have had an exciting time.

But it's not the only thing they're interested in. As we shall find later, they saw this new development, the Body of Christ: God's solution to human individual personality, with all its problems and clashes. It was a new kind of a being in which uncountable myriads of redeemed human beings would be formed into one great living entity, without losing their individual personality. The only thing like it in our world is a human body, made up of many individual members, each with its own personality, but one entity. And the breathtaking thing about it is how Paul explains it. Each member is placed into the Holy Spirit, and each one is filled with the Holy Spirit. It goes beyond our greatest imagination, but it's true.

4. Man in relation to Christ, his Head: a question of loyalty (ch. 11)

Danger: disloyalty to headship and lordship of Christ. Answer: a new regime

As we come backwards still further to chapter 11, which must be our springboard for this evening, we see not only a new kind of human race and a new entity which would people the heavens, but a new regime. We are not saved and then left, like Abraham, simply as an individual directly responsible to God with no intermediary. For Christian people there is a new regime. As well as God the Father, to whom we are ultimately responsible, God has appointed us a Christ to be Lord, to whom we are immediately responsible. A messiah, a sovereign, a leader, a shepherd, call him what you will, to whom we should be loyal. Abraham didn't have that. We do; and it's part of what it means to be a redeemed man and woman. It's new, but you might perceive some early prototypes of it in the Old Testament.

Moses

He was used by God to bring Israel out of slavery in Egypt. Moses came to reveal the name of God to the Israelites in Egypt and get them to put their faith in God. But for the exodus to be a success it was necessary not only that the Israelites believed God, they had to believe Moses; so God gave him all kinds of miracles to do so that the people should believe him. When it came to the critical moment on which their very fate hung as they stood on the banks of the Red Sea, they looked back to hear what the noise was coming up behind them and saw Pharaoh and all his chariots. The Red Sea was in front of them and they shrieked in their panic. They thought that they must go back under Pharaoh now, and could almost feel the lash of the taskmaster again upon their backs.

Then they cried out to the Lord, and God told Moses: 'Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground' (Exod 14:16). The waters parted, and as Moses stood there Israel had to make a choice: they went back to Pharaoh, or they got baptized to Moses.

For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. (1 Cor 10:1-2)

Believing in God meant believing in Moses, and committing themselves to Moses as the God appointed captain of their salvation. If you were a true Israelite, you couldn't believe in God without accepting Moses.

King David

God eventually chose David to be the divinely appointed king; the anointed one—the Messiah, in Hebrew. If, then, you would be loyal to God, you must obey the king.

So in these shadows from the Old Testament you see early prototypes and shadows of what would become a distinctive thing in Christianity. Nowadays it's not enough to believe in God. If you would be saved you must believe in the Lord Jesus: 'Believe in God; believe also in me', said he (John 14:1). But of course he stands unique. Neither Moses nor David was a new kind of a human being, and Israel was never called 'the body of Moses'. As for David, 'his tomb is

with us to this day' (Acts 2:29). His bones are still in a tomb in Jerusalem city. These shadowy prototypes fall into the background and leave us with this extraordinary wonder, our blessed redeemer.

WHAT IS REDEEMED MAN AND REDEEMED WOMAN?

Something magnificently wonderful! Part of this new race already; part of this great new entity which is the Body of Christ and willing subjects in a new regime under the blessed Lord Jesus as head. How I wish I could impress upon you the wonder of it, to get you to see it as you've never seen before.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE UNDER THIS NEW REGIME?

But now we must come down to the practicalities. We are going to start thinking about the first set of faults. In chapter 11 there are two sets, both of which concern themselves with the misuse, abuse and neglect of the Christian symbols laid down for our use by the Lord Jesus and his apostles. In those symbols we express our obedience to God, our devotion to the Lord Jesus, and our respect for one another.

1. Symbols of headship

In the first major paragraph of the chapter, Paul deals with head covering. When Christian men pray or prophesy they do not cover their heads, but when Christian women pray and prophesy they do cover their heads. Apparently at Corinth they got it wrong. They were either misusing or completely neglecting these symbols. Our interest tonight is not so much in their fault, but what Paul does to correct it.

Paul appeals first to the Christian men

'Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head' (v. 4)

What head is it that he has dishonoured? If he has his own physical head covered when he prays or prophesies, what head is he dishonouring? Verse 3 will give you the answer and I would like us to concentrate on it for a moment.

'But I want you to know,' says Paul. It is something that we as believers need to know and grasp—this is essential before the problem can be solved. 'I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ [the Messiah]; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God' (KJV). These are the basic facts, and they take us in one stride to the heart of *the wonder of our Christian gospel*. Notice that last remark, 'and the head of [the Messiah] is God'. We might well spend our whole evening on that phrase, working out its implications and the wonder of it. If we were to do that, I suspect the whole lot of us should end in worship.

Christ has his head

Just imagine what this verse is saying. The head of the Messiah, the head of the Christ, is God. Who is this Messiah? He is the Son of God: second person of the eternal Trinity, as the theologians call him. But when we remember this, we shall immediately remember that he was not always the Messiah. There were uncharted ages of eternity when he was not the

Messiah. He became the Messiah for God's sake and for our sakes, so that he might redeem us and bring us back to God.

'I want you to understand that,' says Paul—otherwise salvation could become a thin little thing, an arbitrary matter of a few regulations that may be ignored. My brother, my sister, let the wonder of this grip your heart just now. It was for your sake and for mine, as it was also for God's sake, to bring us back to him, that he who is very God and stood on equality with God became Messiah. For him, becoming Messiah meant knowing God as his head. The wonder of it! How beautifully it is expressed in the early Christian hymn that Paul quotes in his letter to the Philippians: 'Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped' (2:5–6).

Being eternally existent in the form of God, he thought it not a prize to be on equality with God, for he never ceased to be God; but what he gladly surrendered for our sakes was being on equal terms with God. He did not think of it as a prize—something to be grasped and held on to. He whom angels worshipped did not cling to his outward dignities, but gave up being on equal terms with God. Whereas God was as he always was in his unsullied presence, this blessed one was born in a stable amongst some of the humblest of his little creatures. He humbled himself—*poured himself out*, the word means—and took the form of a servant. While being God of very God, he became a servant (v. 7). That's what it means for him to be Messiah. Grasp it if you can.

We have such funny ideas of what it means to be Messiah, and what it means to be king. You can almost admire the ambition of James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They saw more clearly than others that one day Jesus would be acknowledged throughout the universe as the Messiah. They rubbed their hands with glee at the prospect, and their mother wasn't behind in helping them on in their ambitions either (Matt 20:20–21).

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.' And he said to them, 'What do you want me to do for you?' And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.' Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?' And they said to him, 'We are able.' And Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.' (Mark 10:35–40)

But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. (vv. 43–44)

Not to compare great things with small, but which do you think is the more important: half a dozen pigs in a sty all shouting their heads off to be fed, or the farmer who comes to feed them? Who is the more important? It's the farmer, isn't it? The comparison is so weak and thin, compared with what it meant for him to step from that throne, to kneel at our feet and wash them, and serve us (John 13:5).

'And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross' (Phil 2:8). Not a heroic martyr's death, surrounded by

thousands of loving disciples admiring his courage and praising him even as he died; but to die as the song of the drunkard, with the spittle of ignorant and sadistic men, and little religious hypocrites mocking him. This is what it meant for the Son of God to become Messiah, to accept God as his head, and do the will of God to procure our redemption.

'My dear Corinthians, I would so like you to get hold of that', said Paul. 'It is so fundamental that, once you get hold of it, it will reorientate your whole attitude and outlook.' Christ has his head. It's wonderful to think what happened when he was born in the manger and for our sakes went to Calvary, but for a moment let's remember what chapter 15 tells us of God's great scheme in appointing him. 'God has put all things in subjection under his feet. But when it says, 'all things are put in subjection', it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him' (v. 27). This is God's word about the Man, the Messiah, quoting Psalm 8:4:

What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet.

Then it adds, 'When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all' (v. 28)

That is, God, who subjected all things to Christ and put them under Christ's feet, still remains above the Messiah. It is a very complicated verse, but it means that God was confronted with a whole universe and a world of men and women who had gone astray. How should God bring back his great empire? He appointed his viceroy, his own Son, who for our sakes became the Messiah, and became man.

God's plan was that Christ should redeem mankind by being obedient unto death—the death of the cross. Now God has highly exalted him and given him a name above every name, not only in this age but that which is to come. And God has ordained that one day everything in heaven, earth and hell will bow the knee and admit Christ's moral right to rule (see Phil 2:5-9). He shall restore all things. As Colossians puts it: 'For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven' (1:19-20).

And when the Lord Jesus has brought that vast empire, including you and me, back to the Father, then the Son shall himself bow and be subjected to the Father. 'When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all' (1 Cor 15:28).

What a magnificent role our Lord Jesus carries, and we do well to sing,

I cannot tell why He, whom angels worship,
Should set His love upon the sons of men,
Or why, as Shepherd, He should seek the wanderers,
To bring them back, they know not how or when.

But this I know, that He was born of Mary,
 When Bethlehem's manger was His only home,
 And that He lived at Nazareth and laboured,
 And so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.
 I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,
 When, at His bidding, every storm is stilled,
 Or who can say how great the jubilation
 When all the hearts of men with love are filled.
 But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,
 And myriad, myriad human voices sing,
 And earth to heaven, and heaven to earth, will answer:
 At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is King.¹⁰

'I'd like you to know that,' says Paul, 'and think about it. I'd like you to use your God given imagination to grasp it, and when you grasp it, now listen to what I have to say.'

It's letting no secrets loose to say that sometimes these verses are expounded as though the ladies had the monopoly of their interest. Won't you forgive this hard-hearted man who stands before you, if I give a little prominence to the men, just to make up the weight?

So, my good fellow Christian men, listen to this. If you've grasped what is involved in the Son of God becoming the Messiah, obeying God as his head and becoming a servant, then every male who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head. Not his own physical head, his head just mentioned in verse 3: he dishonours the Lord Jesus. You wouldn't want to do that, would you? Why don't Christian men cover their heads when they pray or prophesy?

Some say, 'Well, that is simply because they're good Irishmen,' and others say, 'It's simply because they're polite Englishmen.'

It's nothing to do with it, of course. Absolutely nothing!

Some say it's because it was a Greek custom, a custom in Corinth. When Greeks prayed to their gods they prayed with nothing on their heads. '*Aperto capite*', the Romans said: 'with bare head'. Romans by contrast, at least the high official ones, when they were at their dignified ceremonies, prayed '*velato capite*', 'with covered head'. So the customs weren't the same across the ancient world.

Nowadays, if you go to a Jewish synagogue you will find the men not only wear the *yarmulke*,¹¹ but when they pray they cover their heads with the prayer shawl out of reverence for God. Like Elijah did when he stood at the entrance of the cave and God passed by (1 Kgs 19:13).

What is the *Christian* reason why Christian men when they pray and prophesy don't cover their heads? The reason is that *they are pointing to who they believe Jesus is*. By this symbol they are indicating that Jesus is their head: he is the Messiah and they stand under him as his representatives, immediately responsible to him. Because that is the significance of the

¹⁰ [William Young Fullerton](#) (1857–1932), 'I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship' (1920).

¹¹ A *yarmulke* (also called a *skullcap* or by its Hebrew name, *kippah*) is a small, round head covering worn by Jews during prayer and by some Jews at all times.

symbol, then for a Christian man to neglect the symbol and pray or prophesy with his head covered would be understood in heaven as dishonouring the Lord Jesus.

It's like a wedding ring. I must be careful, because in another city last week I mentioned E-Type Jaguars, at which all the young people laughed. Apparently E-Type Jaguars went out a long time ago, and they guessed how old I was! For all I know, wedding rings have similarly disappeared; but in my youth ladies used to wear wedding rings and jolly proud they were.

'Is that a wedding ring?'

'Yes.'

'And who's your husband?'

They were very quick to tell you. It would be odd if a woman got rid of her wedding ring, wouldn't it?

'Why aren't you wearing your wedding ring?'

'I don't want anybody to know I'm married.'

'Really? Who are you married to?'

'I never tell anybody, and the last thing I want to do is to advertise it.'

That would be odd, wouldn't it?

For Christian men to pray or prophesy with their heads covered dishonours their immediate head, Jesus Christ our Lord. You won't do it, will you?

You say, 'What's the use of symbols like that? Nobody understands them nowadays.'

But nobody in the ancient world understood them either. If we were to say to an old Greek, 'I have seen a Christian man at his prayers and he was praying with his head uncovered,' that wouldn't surprise the Greek because that's what he did himself.

So you say, 'Well if nobody understood what was happening, why do it? It does sound silly.'

Tell me about the Lord's Supper, where you take bread and wine in memory of the Lord Jesus. If a Greek wandered into a Christian church and saw early Christians eating bread and drinking wine, they would have said to themselves, 'Ah yes, this is a kind of communal spiritual religious meal, or something.'

But unless you told them, they never would have guessed that the bread was symbolic of the body of a carpenter who worked in Nazareth, and the wine represented his blood. No Greek would ever have imagined that in his wildest dreams. But then the Christians could always tell the Greeks that it was a God appointed symbol.

Symbols are like that. For all I know, the Pygmies wouldn't know why ladies wear wedding rings. They don't; so they wouldn't understand it. You'd have to tell them what they meant. That's how symbols are.

This is a God appointed symbol, gentlemen. You will observe it, won't you?

Then Paul appeals to the Christian women

'But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head'
(v. 5 KJV)

With that we come to the difference—that much disputed difference.

‘Why the difference?’ says somebody. ‘A man honours the Lord Jesus, his head, by uncovering it, why should women cover their heads when they pray and prophesy?’

‘But I would have you know,’ says Paul, ‘that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man’ (v. 3 KJV). And the coward in me would remind the ladies present that I didn’t write it; I’m only telling you what the Bible says. You can’t blame me for it! But I fancy Paul felt that when the Corinthians read this they wouldn’t all be smiling, and he added a little something: ‘and the head of Christ is God.’ Does Christ have a head? He does indeed. Will the ladies object to having one, if Christ himself has a head?

Anyway, it stands written as it is, and if a woman will not use the symbol and prays and prophesies with her head uncovered, unveiled, she dishonours her head. That is, her head immediately above her. She dishonours the man, and it is one and the same thing as if she was shorn or shaved (v. 6). That is saying something very dark, for in the ancient world adulteresses could be paraded with their heads shorn. Their hair was cut off completely, and what a shame it was to their husbands when society treated a woman like that. ‘To refuse the symbol is to dishonour her head, the man,’ says Paul.

You say, ‘Why the difference? Why is it that to honour their head, men have to leave their heads uncovered; but to honour their head, women have to cover their heads? Why the opposite way round?’

Paul proceeds to explain: ‘For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man’ (vv. 7–9). That accounts for the difference.

Man is God’s viceroy; woman is man’s viceroy

Here Paul takes us back not simply to redemption, as he has done in the first few verses; he takes us back to Genesis and creation. ‘Man is the image and glory of God’ — in what sense? Man is God’s viceroy. ‘What is man?’ Man is something:

What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet. (Ps 8:4–6)

As far as the animals are concerned, man is a kind of a god; he comes between them and God (vv. 7–8). Man officially is God’s viceroy and therefore carries the glory of God.

But if you observe the story of Genesis you will find three things:

1. The man and the woman were not made at exactly the same time. According to Genesis 2 man was made first, then God summoned the animals before him and he named them — a fit occupation for someone who was to be their lord and master under God. And then God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him’ (v. 18). So the woman was not made at the same time as the man, says Genesis.

2. The man was made direct and woman was made out of man, not man out of the woman.
3. The woman was made for man—queen to his king, to be a helper fit for him and a supporter in his tasks.

Sum all that up and you will see that man is the image and glory of God; man is God's viceroy. The woman was made for man; she is man's viceroy. Man is the glory of God; woman is the glory of man. There is a difference, then, in function.

If you don't accept Genesis, then all this is so much nonsense. Tonight I am talking to people who I'm persuaded do believe Genesis. What is man, according to the Bible? This is God's idea of man; and this is how God made them.

Difference in function

Let's clear away one or two misapprehensions. When it says that man is the head of the woman, it's not implying that woman is some inferior kind of human being. It doesn't mean that. When it says, for instance, that God is the head of Christ and Christ has his head, it doesn't mean that the Son of God is inferior in essence to God. He's equal with the Father, equally divine. But being equally divine in nature he chose to humble himself in this function. So woman is every bit equal with man, as to her essential nature.

And similarly, when it comes to salvation, men and women are saved on the same terms. Be they Jews or Greeks or Gentiles, or whatever they are, when it comes to salvation they're saved on exactly the same terms. We're not talking about salvation, we're now talking of function, and our functions are different. By God's design they are different at the physical level and they are different at the spiritual level. When it comes to redemption and our functioning in this new regime, God proposes to keep the difference.

Let's use an analogy. A good cricket or football team has a board whose members own it and the board appoints a manager. Together they choose the team and appoint one amongst the eleven to be captain. That doesn't mean the other ten in the football team are inferior human beings to the captain; but it does mean that on the field they agree to obey the captain. Isn't that so? Of course, each individual footballer can appeal above the head of the captain to the manager, and, if they want to, the players on the field can appeal beyond the manager to the central board in control. But in the day-to-day workings, the ten players on the field obey the captain. Off the field, the captain and all the others obey the manager; and when it comes to the yearly accounts, the manager and all the rest of them have to do what the board says. I don't know that anybody gets very upset about it.

And it is so under God's new regime.

The angels

'And there's another reason that we ought to obey these symbols,' says Paul. 'It's because of the angels' (v. 10), and the best meaning of it as far as I can make out is what Paul says in Ephesians: 'So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places' (3:10).

What do Michael and Gabriel and all the vast intelligences think, as they see the ruin and chaos that sin caused in our world? And now they see the Lord Jesus, the Redeemer, not only

forgiving us but bringing us into his regime and creating a harmonious hierarchy of servants, copying him, who accepted his head and obeyed.

That is not to say that men are to act as tyrants over women, and particularly in the home. Paul goes on to point out that in creation Adam was made by God direct, and Eve was made out of Adam. In ordinary life in the home, things are somewhat different. Most men have a mother and most women have a father, so the two sexes are mutually interdependent in the home. They are subject of course to the Lord, each with his or her own function.

2. A symbol of glory

'And finally,' says Paul, 'you'll observe these symbols because your own sensitivity teaches you—"Does not nature itself teach you?"' (v. 14). Paul was writing to Greek people, and I fancy they would have agreed that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonour to him—thus it was felt at least in the ancient world. 'But if a woman has long hair, it is her glory' (v. 15). Notice the 'if'—not all women do have a lovely head of hair, but *if* they do it's a glory. It's still true to this day. See a woman with a beautiful head of hair and people are open-mouthed in admiration. It's a glory to her.

It isn't so in the animal world though. Take lions for instance: it is the male that has the beautiful mane. He's the charming chap and the lioness is a bit nondescript in comparison, but in humans it's the other way round. It's us men folks that look nondescript and it's the ladies who have the beautiful hair. And if they have it, it's a glory: magnificent and beautiful. That's why they should cover it when it comes to spiritual activity. When a woman is praying and prophesying, it's not to herself and to her own glory that she will call attention.

I remember being at the Lord's Supper once. We were all getting ready to remember the Lord when a dear sister came in—she was a dear sister; I think she did it in all innocence, not aware of her potential. But she came in wearing a hat with a feather that would have cut the necks off people sitting two seats on the right! It wasn't exactly the best preparation to concentrate the mind on the one who for our sakes was crowned with thorns. Etiquette, if nothing else, would have suggested that, however glorious, and by God's good intention to be admired in other circumstances, when it came to spiritual exercise she covered her glory appropriately, so that all attention is riveted on Christ.

So Paul corrected the faults. But it does not mean, and he is not saying, that women have no part to play. Woman praying and prophesying, not in church but on many other semi-official occasions as they have opportunity, like Anna the prophetess, Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist and wife of Zechariah, and others, exercise a powerful ministry for God in their proper sphere in this and in foreign lands.

Paul wanted us to know this. In our ministries, we men and women are under a new regime where everyone has his or her head, our blessed Lord included, and we do well to follow his example and keep those symbols that point to our ready obedience. In so doing, we proclaim to the world who exactly we consider Jesus is.

Shall we pray.

Lord we bring thee thy word now and pray thou wilt further open our eyes and warm our hearts, so that we may learn the wonder that thy Son, who, for thy sake and for ours, became the Christ and was obedient unto death.

Our hearts shout their acclaim already, as we hear that thou hast raised him from the dead and highly honoured him. And we remember that, as thine exalted Messiah, he will yet serve all his people. We bless thee for bringing us into his kingdom. Make us like him, we do beseech thee, and help us, even in this matter of these symbols, to glorify him and to magnify his grace, and to serve thee acceptably and with godly fear. For his name's sake. Amen.

Man in Relation to Christ, his Head

A Question of Loyalty (2)

We thought last time about one set of symbols that the Corinthians were either ignoring or perverting. We must now think about a second set of symbols that they were likewise completely perverting; and that may seem strange to us, because the second set of symbols was no less than the bread by which our Lord Jesus asked us to remember him, and the cup of wine by which we remember the fact that he poured out his blood for us.

Nevertheless, the fact is true, the Corinthians were coming together and behaving in such a manner that it was not possible for them to eat the Lord's Supper as it should be eaten. The Greek may even be translated that they *had no intention* of eating it as it should be eaten, for the simple reason that they had lost sight of the meaning and significance of those sacred symbols (11:17–22).

Symbols of remembrance

So tonight, in our first half, we shall be thinking of their fault in this matter; but once more in particular about the way in which Paul goes about correcting it. He quotes what he himself had received from the Lord Jesus about the significance of the Lord's Supper, and so brings them back to what lies at *the very heart of our Christian gospel*.

It would appear that the way they came to spoil these symbols was that they were much attached to the early Christian custom of meeting together for a meal of friendship and fellowship. In some sources it was called *agápē*, where it is thought that each one would have brought his contribution in good Greek fashion; and *éranos*, in which each person brought a contribution and then shared what they had with one another. So the rich, who brought more, would share out their surplus with the poor, who couldn't afford to bring so much, and all would be satisfied.

The occasion of course was to eat, but not just to satisfy hunger. It was that the eating should express the common bond of love and fellowship that existed between the believers. It was their early custom, and highly to be praised. It is so easy to sit in formal meetings of a church and scarcely get to know the person who sits beside you as a person, but just as somebody who occupies a pew somewhere near you. To get to know them in the atmosphere of a Christian meal and fellowship is a delightful thing, and can only eventually enhance our spiritual worship.

But unfortunately with these Greek Christians the habit grew that the love feast was turned into a common meal, where, in complete disregard for one another, each kept what he

had brought to himself, and the rich brought plentiful supply without bothering to share it. They treated it as though they were at home and ate and drank to their full and beyond (v. 21).

It had a most unfortunate effect on the poorer members of the church. When they saw their richer brothers and sisters indulging in the kind of spread that they saw only once in a blue moon, it made them feel alienated and unwelcome and humiliated, because they were only able to bring their small provisions. It was therefore a denial in the first place of Christian love; instead of promoting fellowship, it did the very opposite.

More seriously, they so concentrated on this so-called love feast that when it came time to eat the Lord's Supper in remembrance of him, they were not in any fit state to do it. And if they did, it was nearly a mockery, because they couldn't concentrate on what they were doing. Paul now proceeds to rebuke them for this grievous fault, and then to put it right.

That may seem very, very distant to us here tonight, for we would never dream of doing any such thing. Our organizers make us content with a biscuit and a cup of tea. But I have been at the Lord's Supper in another country where the music, if you could call it that, was so loud and raucous that when the wine and the bread were passed round I could hardly hear myself think, let alone concentrate on what I was supposed to be doing. So I shall not count myself necessarily superior to these Corinthians, but seek to listen very carefully as Paul corrects them.

How did Paul correct them?

By bringing them back to the significance of those symbols, the bread and the wine:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (11:23–26)

No words of mine are necessary to show that the significance of these two symbols takes us to the very heart of our Christian gospel, and underlines the lesson that has now been recurring many times. It is possible for Christian people, even in church activities, gradually to drift away and lose our grip on the very basic elements of the gospel, and fail any longer to perceive their wonder and their wealth, so that they become mere routine trivialities. We go through them thinking of half a dozen other things, distracted and not concentrating, until the routine becomes empty of meaning; and being regarded empty of meaning, it is sometimes then discarded as being unnecessary. How could we ever forget it?

Why did our Lord choose this way for us to remember him?

He could have ordained that when we meet together, someone should have got up and read officially the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7). That being so, we should have remembered him chiefly as a teacher of ethics. He did teach ethics, but that's not how he asked to be remembered. He could have ordained that somebody should have got up and read select

miracles that he performed, and thus we should have remembered him chiefly as a performer of miracles. His miracles were important and exceedingly significant, but that is not how he asked us to remember him.

Taking what lay at his very heart, and had done from the moment he stepped out of heaven, and what surely must lie at our hearts and bind us to him, he chose these humble elements. ‘Take, eat this bread,’ he said, ‘to remind you of me, that I gave my body for you. Take this cup and drink it; the wine will recall for you my blood, and remember I poured out my life for you.’ How could we forget it? How could we let anything come and distract us from it? What hurt we should do to the Lord Jesus.

Deftly but solemnly Paul puts the description of his instructions from the Lord Jesus, ‘For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you’ (v. 23). What a sermon it preaches. To think that on the very night he instituted this remembrance feast, there was one at least who was about to betray him, and another who was about to deny him. All the others were squabbling about irrelevant and distasteful things: who should be biggest among them? And if that was their hearts, what about mine? And who shall describe that kind of love— knowing about Peter and the rest, he gave his body and he gave his blood?

How should we forget it? Though to be sure, as Peter says, there are Christians—I suppose they’re Christians—who presently, as they march on in life, forget the cleansing of their former sins. It sounds incredible doesn’t it?

But then we have precedent for it. The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt. They groaned and muttered and they cried, and they called out to God; and God eventually heard them and brought them out by the blood of the Passover lamb and through the baptism in the Red Sea. All went well and they scurried away from Pharaoh as fast as their legs could carry them. They got a few miles down the road and—do you know what?—they forgot what the whole thing was about.

‘That’s impossible,’ you say.

Well, it happened anyway.

They said, ‘What are we doing here in the middle of the wilderness? This is rather ridiculous! We remember the garlic and the onions and the cucumbers.’

It would have been helpful if they’d remembered a few more things, such as taskmasters. It came near to suggesting that they should give up the whole scheme.

You say, ‘It’s incredible.’

In middle life we can behave sometimes as though we have done what Peter says some do, and forget what the whole thing was about: ‘having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins’ (2 Pet 1:9). We can begin as believers to behave sinfully and selfishly, and compromise the Lord’s name and glory. Lest we forget, our blessed Lord wisely told us to take bread and wine and remember him.

Objections that people raise

Objection 1: ‘I’m afraid that the routine will dull it of its significance.’

I suppose you can get used to being forgiven, can’t you? It becomes kind of ordinary. I remember when strawberries were looked forward to once a year, because they were rather

rare things, and strawberries were marvellous. They're not marvellous now; you can get them any day of the week.

Is forgiveness like that? Not if I do what the Lord Jesus said, and let God's Holy Spirit bring afresh to me the meaning of that bread and wine, and what the Lord Jesus did. To take those symbols of his body and blood that Christ gave so that I might be forgiven, and to come lightly to that ceremony with sin unconfessed and not attend to what I am doing is a very solemn thing. 'That could be to be guilty of the body and blood of Christ; guilty of murdering the Lord Jesus,' says Paul.

You say, 'How come?'

In a very profound and real sense, it was our sins that killed the Lord, and as we remember it the first thing we do is to repent again and we have his forgiveness. To sin and not repent, and yet take that cup, is to be unashamedly, unrepentantly guilty of having killed the Lord Jesus.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement on himself. (1 Cor 11:27-29)

You say, 'The best thing, then, is to stay away.'

How can you think such a thought? What—so that you can go on sinning? No, the best thing is to come and to remember what our sins cost him, so that we might repent of them more deeply and live thereafter the more holily.

THE NEW COVENANT

But there is another side to it. When our Lord Jesus took the cup, he said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me' (v. 25). So this is a matter that we must attend to when we drink the cup at the Lord's Supper. It is not simply that his blood was poured out so that we might be forgiven; in handing us that cup he calls us to observe that this cup is the new covenant in his blood.

The very ceremony by which our Lord Jesus introduced it, simple as it was, recalled the old covenant. When God gathered the Israelites around Mount Sinai he announced his propositions to them: that they should be his peculiar people, a kingdom of priests, if only they would keep the terms of the covenant. And the people said they would be agreeable.

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel. So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do.' (Exod 19:5-8)

So God had Moses recite the terms of the law that should be the basis of the covenant between them. Not content with that, God said, 'Now that the people have heard it, Moses,

write it in a book so that it might be there in black and white and no one will ever be able to say, “but I didn’t know that was in the covenant”.’ So Moses wrote it all in a book, and made it very clear that he wasn’t making it up as he went along; he was reading it from the book. These were the terms of God’s holy law that formed the basis of their covenant, and the challenge went out to the people: did they or did they not accept these terms?

Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.’ (Exod 24:7)

And that being so, Moses brought the covenant victims and had them slain and caught their blood in a basin. Holding up the basin full of blood before the people, he said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words’ (v. 8). That was the old covenant, the terms of which they had promised to obey.

Don’t you see the similarity between that and what the Lord Jesus did, as he took a cup and filled it with wine? Holding it out to his disciples he said, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood’ (Luke 22:20).

Why should you need a new covenant if you already have an old one? Well, there were certain deficiencies in the old covenant. Of course it wasn’t the old covenant’s fault. With the old covenant, the best it could do was to have the terms of its laws inscribed on tables of stone by a master mason, or, as the text says, ‘written with the finger of God’ (Exod 31:18). You put them in the tabernacle for good preservation, and they told the people what they had to do. It was excellent, you couldn’t find fault with it; except that it didn’t work.

Why didn’t it work?

The law, written on those tables of stone, could tell people what to do, but it couldn’t give them the ‘puff’ with which to do it. It could tell the people what *not* to do, but could give them no power to refrain from doing what they should not do, and in the end they broke the covenant and God set them aside. When God did that at the great exile, he moved Jeremiah to prophesy that God himself would bring in a new covenant one day. Why another covenant if the first one didn’t really work? Ah, because it is a new covenant and the new covenant had different terms.

I feel like calling for volunteers just now. Let me see—somebody who has been observing the Lord’s Supper for these last ten years, fifty-two times a year. We’ll cut off the odd two and say fifty times a year. Five hundred times you have kept the Lord’s Supper and taken the cup. Could I call on you to stand up and repeat the words of the covenant? I won’t do it now though, because you surely can, can’t you? All of the terms? I hope we could, otherwise were we really attending to what the Lord was saying when he handed the cup? What was he saying? ‘This cup . . . is the new covenant in my blood’ (Luke 22:20)—and here come the terms of the covenant—‘I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds’ (Heb 10:16).

Someone says, ‘Mr Preacher, when are you going to get round to the real point of the Lord’s Supper? It’s the worship meeting—did you not know that?’

Well, I’ve heard it so said; and there’s no other thing on earth calculated to move our hearts to worship more than the remembrance of the Lord Jesus. But actually, in the New Testament you would be hard put to find any instruction that you’re supposed to worship at the Lord’s

Supper. Carry on worshipping; I am not discouraging you. By all means worship—how could you refrain from worshipping the Lord if you remember him?

As he handed the cup his primary concern was: 'This is the new covenant in my blood—and what I'm proposing to do is to write my laws on your hearts. Oh, yes, there will be forgiveness, but you will not be perfect at once. You are to know that God will never bring up your sins and iniquities against you in the court of his justice; the penalty has been paid once and for all through my blood—the blood shed for the forgiveness of sins.'

And God himself in the terms of the covenant says, 'I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more' (v. 17)—'their sins and iniquities, I will never reap up against them, nor bring them to remembrance in my court of justice. The whole business, as far as penalty goes, is finished.'

Marvellous, isn't it! But it doesn't mean that, because my sins and their penalty will never be brought up against me, I am free to do as I like.

What is it to be a redeemed man and to be a redeemed woman? It is to be under a new regime. Don't call him 'King' if you don't want to, but do call him 'Lord'—and it comes to nearly the same thing, doesn't it? And it's the Lord who hands us the cup, and says, 'I will write my laws on your heart.'

God's work in our hearts

They were a marvellous crowd were those Corinthians, and doubtless there were some who criticized Paul for preaching the doctrine of justification by faith to them. I daresay they were tempted to say, 'Now look here, Paul, if you will go around preaching to people that they can be saved by faith apart from the works of the law, what do you expect? If you tell them that they can be saved and sure of it, the Corinthians will invent all kinds of sins and deviations. You ought to preach the law to them.'

'Not so,' says Paul. 'The law can tell people what to do, but it can't give them the power to do it. I have seen a miracle happen in Corinth. God has made me efficient as a minister of the new covenant, and what God is doing is writing his laws, not on tables of stone, but on fleshy tables of the heart, using me as a pen, and the Holy Spirit, so to speak, as the ink' (see 2 Cor 3:3–6).

The risen Lord had begun to write on the hearts of the Corinthians. And that takes some doing, doesn't it? You can write laws on a bit of stone because the granite doesn't move, and so long as you've got a sharp chisel and a moderate technique you can get the letters to stay put. If you try writing the message on people's hearts, they're slippery things: it would be like trying to write a message in olive oil! And yet it is the genius of our risen Lord that he engraves the laws of God on the heart by his Holy Spirit through his servants, the apostles, evangelists and the teachers, using them as pens.

What does it mean? First of all, it means to give them the very life and nature of God; and then to educate them so that that life can be developed. Oh, what a lovely thing the Lord is saying, my sister, my brother, when he invites you to remember him. Not merely that he's cancelled your sins and their penalty in the past; he's going to make you like himself. 'I promise it,' says he, 'and I seal my promise with my blood.'

Objection 2: 'Is it really necessary to come to the Lord's Supper?'

I don't know about you. I suppose you are eager and glad to come every week to the Lord's Supper, and ready to burst forth with your praise. I don't always. I come after a difficult week and boundless disappointments at my shabby substandard Christianity, and say, 'Where are all my resolutions of twenty years ago? Am I no better than this? Is it worth trying to carry on?' I shouldn't be thinking of those things, should I? I should be like you, full of the Lord.

I get round to it in the end. When he hands me the cup and I take it, knowing the worst, he says, 'I've signed it in my blood; I'm going to write my laws on your heart.' He will do it, and one day we shall be conformed to his image.

'But Lord, this week I've failed.'

'I know that,' he says, 'and your sins and iniquities I will remember no more.'

You will come, won't you, for the Lord means business. If I don't come, what will happen? If I come unworthily, carelessly, without any attempt to discern myself, just living as I always do, not meaning business with the Lord but constantly repeating, 'Now, Lord, what's the next thing that's got to change in my life? Lord, please deal with this.' If I do that, what will happen?

Well, my dear fellow believer, what will happen is this. The Lord has covenanted to write his laws on your heart; he has signed the covenant in his blood, and he'll do it. Only this time it mightn't be so comfortable for you. Let him do it with your cooperation. Sometimes that will be painful, but it is a covenant and if you don't cooperate he will not stop short of rigorous discipline to write his laws ever more deeply on your heart. *This is the gospel.*

Let me tell you a story. It is the prerogative of the elderly to reminisce, so why shouldn't I? I was in a country far away and in a church I'd never visited before. On a Sunday morning they had two sessions. The first session was the Lord's Supper at which I was invited to pass on a word. Then after a break they had a second meeting and I was invited to preach. As they drove me the many miles to where I was staying, one of the elders asked me, 'What did you really think about church today?'

I should have been more sensitive, and told him already, shouldn't I?

I said, 'I enjoyed the Lord's Supper and I was struck with how many unconverted people you got at the second session.'

At the Lord's Supper there was a handful of people and at the second session there must have been more than a hundred. Their faces fell.

'But they weren't unconverted people; they were members of the church,' he said.

'Members of the church? But they weren't at the Lord's Supper.'

'No,' he said, 'the majority don't come to the Lord's Supper.'

I said, 'Really?'

'Well,' he said, 'you can't make them come, can you? If you tell them they have to come, they won't come.'

That set me thinking. I've never been an elder, so I've been excused the decision. Can you tell people they've got to come to the Lord's Supper? We'd better put the question to the Lord Jesus.

'Lord, do you tell people that they ought to come to remember you, or have you left it optional?'

And when I think of that, I can't help remembering what Luke tells us in his early history of what happened on the day of Pentecost, when the multitude that so recently had denied that Jesus was the Messiah and had him crucified were brought to repentance by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit. 'Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"' (Acts 2:37). They had come to believe that Jesus was after all the Messiah, but they'd murdered him. That was a pickle to be in, wasn't it? In great consternation they came to the Apostle Peter and said, 'What shall we do?' and he said, 'You'd better start repenting.'

He didn't tell them to believe; they believed already that Jesus was the Messiah. That was why they were upset. They were wondering what to do about the fact that they'd murdered him. He said, 'You'd better start repenting.'

'Yes, and what will that mean?'

'Well, you'll be baptized, every one of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus.'

That was inconvenient for some of them. Surely it was. I can imagine someone coming up to Peter and saying, 'You said that if we really are repentant we ought to be baptized.'

'Yes, I did.'

'Well, I have repented; but, you see, baptism would be highly inconvenient for me. My father is a leading member of the Sanhedrin and it would be awfully embarrassing for the family if I were to get baptized. So, I've just come to make sure that I can repent without being baptized!'

What do you suppose Peter would have said?

'Did you not stand publicly here some weeks ago and say "Crucify him"? You stood with his murderers, and now you've repented. God won't take your say-so, unless you're prepared to show by your actions that you mean what you say. Publicly you denied him, now publicly you will confess him; and if you're not prepared to do that, God isn't prepared to take your say-so for it.'

So they got baptized. Of course they did—because they had really repented. And then, having repented, 'they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers' (v. 42). They really believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and Peter and company were his apostles. Jesus was God's incarnate Son and heir to the universe, so of course they came and consulted with the apostles and were eager to learn everything they could about him.

Would anyone have said, 'I believe that Jesus is the Messiah, but that's as far as I am interested to take it. I don't want to get deeper into these things?'

'You don't? You don't want to get very deep into heaven, I suppose?'

Of course they continued in the fellowship. Listen to John talking about the great eternal Word that was with the Father and was manifested to us.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard

we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:1–3)

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14).

Says John, ‘and we’re writing to you because we want you to share our fellowship: “our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son”.’ To say you’ve repented and believe in Jesus, but you’re not interested in his fellowship would be odd talk, wouldn’t it?

And they not only continued in those things, they continued in the breaking of bread. Of course they did. Once they said that Jesus wasn’t the Messiah-King; now they said they’d repented and had come to believe that he was. They learned from the apostles what the Messiah had said on the night in which he was betrayed, ‘Come, remember me’. How could I say I have repented, if in effect I turned round to the Lord Jesus and said, ‘Well, Lord, I have repented; but as for you writing your laws on my heart and me coming to remember you, I don’t actually see the need for that’?

If the King says, ‘Come, take this bread, take this cup. Let me remind you that I died so that you might be forgiven, and my purpose in saving you is that you and I might do business together as I write my laws ever more deeply on your heart’, how should I stay away if I could be present? And if I do stay away because I’m careless or for some inadequate reason, how shall I face the Lord Jesus and persuade him that I have actually repented and received him as Lord?

Objection 3: ‘The Lord’s Supper is such a solemn and grim time that you can concentrate too much on it.’

I suppose there is some truth to the idea. We remember the blessed Lord who died and has risen, and that act of remembering him we redo until he comes, and we remember his promised return. But how shall we say that remembering the Lord’s death is so sad and dismal that it would put us off? If it is, friend, don’t go to heaven. You wouldn’t be advised to, for part of the song sheet has already been printed: ‘Unto him that loved us, and loosed us from our sins in his blood, to him be the glory and the honour and the majesty for ever and ever. Amen’ (see Rev 1:5–6). Not for all eternity will God or you forget that you were once a sinner and Jesus died for you. Although the experiences of God’s eternal heaven will be wonderful beyond our wildest imagination, that will remain the greatest wonder ever revealed to you.

My dear brothers, it can be that the Lord’s Supper becomes arid. We cannot command our emotions—sometimes they flow and sometimes they ebb. To be frank, sometimes we come and we’re not feeling full and bursting with a lot of praise. Well, you young people may be; but for us old people it’s a different story. But we should come nonetheless, shouldn’t we?

Suppose your wife gives you some remarkable Christmas present, the likes of which you never had in all your days. She’s saved up all her housekeeping money and skimmed on the Brussels sprouts for months to buy you this present. It so happens that when she gives it to you, you don’t feel very good.

Do you say, ‘I don’t feel like saying thank you, so I shan’t’?

No, you say to yourself, 'I don't feel like doing it, but I must. Look at this thing!' So you jolly well take yourself by the collar, shake yourself up, and say, 'Ah well, in the end it's not a matter of emotional feeling.'

So, at the Lord's Supper, we say, 'This is what the Lord Jesus did', and I deliberately call on my soul to remember and to bless his holy name. God forbid that I should ever let anything else so distract me that I could not attend the remembrance of the Lord, for this in the end is the secret of his empire—this is how he proposes to govern us from now to an endless eternity.

What does it mean, then, to be a redeemed human being? It means to be put under a new regime. We should also have considered tonight that it means to be part of this great new entity, which is the Body of Christ, but the clock has defeated me. Perhaps I shall delay the discussion of that topic until our next session, when we shall consider together the great new entity that is the Body of Christ, and pass from that to thinking about what our glorified and redeemed personal bodies should be when the Lord Jesus comes again.

The Christian philosophy of man—what it means to be a redeemed man and woman under the new regime—that's been our study tonight.

Let's conclude it with a word of prayer.

Lord, the things about which we have thought this evening from thy holy word are, for many of us, things that we have known for many years. We bless thee for the experience, unaffected and unpretended, that even here on earth is a theme of perennial freshness, an ever renewed power.

And, Lord Jesus, we turn to thee from the page of thy word to thyself personally, and we bless thee, thou glorious Son of God, thou Son of Man, for coming and taking our humanity, and for dying for us at Calvary. We bless thee thou hast loved us while we were yet sinners, knowing all we were and should be. We bless thee that thy death is sufficient to cover all our many sins, and more beside. We bless thee even more this evening for thy faithful covenant thou art writing. Thou wilt yet write thy laws on our hearts, and our hearts leap within themselves tonight as we rejoice in the prospect of one day attaining the glory of God, and this we owe to thee.

Draw near, Lord, tonight, we beseech thee, as we go to our homes, for the day is far spent. We pray that thou wilt come in—may we not constrain thee to come in—to our homes and the home of our hearts, that thou wilt have converse with us and we with thee, according to thy promise, 'if any man opens the door I will come in and sup with him, and he with me'. Not only in private, but in the public meetings of the church.

If tomorrow we are spared and we come to remember thee, Lord Jesus, grant that, as of old, having expounded thy word and warmed the hearts of thy disciples, thou didst make thyself known peculiarly and personally in the breaking of the bread—so shall it be with us. So that today and tomorrow, under

thy headship, we may make progress and be more like thee before the great day when we meet thee, for the time is short and the journey's end is near.

And thus we bless thy name, and by thy grace depart in thy peace, giving thee thanks. Amen.

Man and the Body of Christ

False and True Motivation

Let me remind you, to begin with this evening, what themes we have been concentrating on in this epistle. We have noticed that, like us, the Corinthians were full of mistakes that they made, both in their individual and private lives and in their church fellowships.

What interested us more was, in the first place, the way that Paul goes about correcting their mistakes. He will on times lay down the law, quote rules and regulations and bid the Corinthians recognize that the things he ordains are the commandments of the Lord. But more prominent even than that is his habit that, when he comes to correct the faults of the Corinthians, he does so by bringing them back to the basic gospel of their salvation. That is a marvellous cure for most, if not of all ills for the people of God: constantly to come back to the basic, glorious and wonderful facts and truths of our gospel. It is possible in our church experience little by little to inch away from the basic principles of the gospel; so we have been tracing that technique of Paul's, the way he corrects the faults of his fellow believers by bringing them *back to the gospel*.

That being so, we found a second strand of interest in this epistle. Because Paul is so frequently expounding the gospel, it comes about naturally that he gives us to see what is *the Christian philosophy of man*. He answers the question, what is man: what does it mean to be truly human? And supremely, not just what does it mean to be human but what does it mean, and will it yet mean, to be a redeemed human being?

It is a wonderful thing simply to be human. I hope you are of that opinion. But what an indescribable wonder it is, and shall be, to be a *redeemed* human being. You will sit here for a long time tonight in some pain and strain for two hours and a half; but you've got a long while yet to go in being human. And if I could once more impress upon all our hearts the wonder of being a redeemed human being, perhaps you will even tonight catch sight again of the glories that are beyond, and rejoice with joy unspeakable and already tinged with the glories of heaven.

So, then, we shall use that same method and consider two major areas of fault, and study how Paul answers them by bringing the people back to the gospel once more. And then, as we hear his answers, we shall perceive yet further the wonders of what it means to be redeemed human beings.

Our first area of study in this first session is chapters 12–14 of the epistle, and here's hoping you have done your homework and read them recently before we came together.

1. The general area of fault in these chapters occurs in relation to the topic of spiritual gifts

As Paul observed in chapter one of the letter, the church at Corinth was richly endowed in spiritual gifts: you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ' (v. 7). Those words show us what the purpose of a gift is. Ahead of us lies that glorious event: not just the *coming* of the Lord Jesus, but the *revelation* of the Lord Jesus.

'Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory' (1 Pet 1:8). Do you find yourself wondering from time to time, my fellow believer—perhaps as you doze off to sleep at night, or in your serious study—what he will really look like when you see him? That first moment when he shall be revealed and we see him, whom all these many years we have learned to love, no longer through a glass darkly but face to face. Oh, what a wonder it will be. In that split second of a moment the gracious work of God's redemption will be complete, and 'we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3:2).

'You come behind in no spiritual gift,' says Paul, 'waiting for the revelation of God's Son.' That's why gifts are given: to prepare the people of God for that inexpressible wonder of seeing the Lord Jesus and being like him. What there is of us; for a baby can be like his father and a grown-up man can be like his father, but there's more of the grown-up man than there is of the baby. We shall all be like Christ—what there is of us. This set Paul working his fingers to the bone against that glorious day, so that he might present every fellow believer fully grown, fully mature. Not spiritual babies any more, but adult, fully grown redeemed men and women (Col 1:28). That is the purpose of gifts. Each believer has a gift and, whatever that gift is, it is ultimately directed towards that glorious end—the increase of the Body of Christ against the day of his coming.

Gifts out of proportion

But when we read chapters 11–14, and particularly chapter 14, it is evident that the dear Corinthians had got their gifts out of perspective and out of proportion. The particular culprit among the many gifts was apparently the gift of tongues. It was given originally as a sign to unbelievers, says Paul (14:22). A self-evident miracle, when unbelievers could hear the gospel being preached in their own native tongue by men who had never learned their language, as happened on the day of Pentecost. A sign, therefore, for unbelievers.

Like other gifts, of course, its use would benefit the user by reflex action. It was but one among the many gifts; but from the length to which Paul has to go in chapter 14 to urge upon his fellow believers that there were more important gifts than tongues, we gather that they had got this one gift all out of proportion. If they loved the people of God, they would seek not tongues but those gifts more calculated to help people to the maximum.

Then we learn from the end of chapter 14 that they not only concentrated very strongly on this very exciting gift, but if you had attended their church meetings you would have found that they were all practising it simultaneously. It must have been an inglorious noise, but there they were doing it all together instead of in a sensible fashion, one-by-one.

And apparently the prophets weren't much better. They had to be exhorted to do this in proper order: only three at the most and one by one in turns (vv. 29–33). For what reason we shall see in a moment.

Chapter 12

How did Paul deal with it?

But if that was the trouble, our chief interest tonight is to notice how Paul deals with it; and he deals with it by bringing them back to this wonderful part of the Christian gospel, this most glorious achievement of our salvation. How shall I find words fit to describe it? He brings them back to what here is called the Body of Christ: to the wonderful fact that, through the redemption that is in Christ, all believers have been formed into the Body of Christ (12:27).

The Body of Christ

Please will you notice that when Paul talks about the Body of Christ, he is not just using a parable: saying to his fellow believers, 'If your church gatherings are going to function efficiently, you ought to look at yourselves as a body'. That is perfectly true, but Paul was not the first man ever to use *the body* as a parable.

The Roman historians relate how that at one stage the ordinary people in Rome, the plebs, as they were called,¹² got fed up with their blue-blooded overlords and went on strike. They withdrew their labour and said, 'You get on with it', and they marched out of the city — they seceded. One of the aristocrats went out to the people and pleaded with them. He used the parable of a body, and through his eloquence he was able to persuade the people that *the body politic* is like a body. All the members need each other: the aristocrats need the workers and the workers need the aristocrats. And by the clever use of the body as a parable he persuaded them to give up their strike and come back and live in the city and cooperate with the aristocrats. He used the body as a parable.

But I want to make the point that when Paul says we are the Body of Christ, he is not simply using a parable. He is not saying, 'you ought to behave *as a body*'. In the first place, he is saying, '*you are a body*'. Whether we behave like we should or we don't, the glorious fact of redemption is that we are a body. Why that is important we shall see now, as Paul tells us how it is that we have been constituted as a body. He doesn't say, 'Aim to be a body', he says, 'You have been constituted a body.'

It is not, of course, a body that in all respects is like our physical bodies. You mustn't argue that the Body of Christ has a liver and a spleen and so many lengths of colon and all that kind of stuff. That would be to carry the analogy too far. But the Body of Christ is a real entity, a living organism, and it bears certain resemblances to a human body — more about that later.

¹² A plebeian was a member of the general citizenry in ancient Rome as opposed to the privileged patrician class. ([Encyclopaedia Britannica](#))

How did we become the Body of Christ?

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (v. 13)

This is how the Body of Christ was brought into being, how it was formed. Notice the double operation:

1. 'In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body'—the first operation: baptism in the Spirit of God;
2. 'and all were made to drink of one Spirit.' Two processes. So we must ask ourselves now what they were.

1. YOU WERE BAPTIZED IN ONE SPIRIT; NOT, YOU WERE BAPTIZED BY ONE SPIRIT

It is not the Holy Spirit that does the baptizing, is it? The Holy Spirit is the person into whom we have been baptized. It's a help to grasp it, if you remember the first man in the New Testament to talk about this: he was John the Baptist.

And he preached, saying, 'After me comes he who is mightier than I . . . I have baptized you with [in] water, but he will baptize you with [in] the Holy Spirit.' (Mark 1:7–8)

Do you see the parallel and the contrast? 'I baptize you in water,' says John. If you can visualize him, here is John the Baptist in his camel hair clothes, munching his locusts and wild honey. If you come to him for baptism, he will take you down into Jordan and place his firm hand around the nape of your neck and put you into the water. John baptizes you in water.

By contrast, the Lord Jesus baptizes us, not now in water; he baptizes us in the Holy Spirit. So we are baptized in the Holy Spirit: we are put in the Holy Spirit. Isn't that magnificent? My seniors, who are on the way to glory longer than I am, you've known this ever since you were sweet seventeen, and you're now ninety-seven, let it come to you with marvel tonight. For the Holy Spirit is not so much stuff; the Holy Spirit is a divine person.

Tell me, if you can, the ultimate of this mystery. The risen Christ has not only cleansed you from your sin and then destined you to some draughty little seat just inside the portals of heaven—he has put you into God the Holy Spirit. How do you bear the wonder of it?

2. AND ALL WERE MADE TO DRINK OF ONE SPIRIT

The complementary operation. Put the two things together. We were baptized in the Holy Spirit—Christ put us in the Holy Spirit. But that wasn't enough; there had to be the second operation in which the thing was reversed. 'And all were made to drink of the Holy Spirit'—the Holy Spirit goes into us.

If you're baptized in water, you go into the water. If you're made to drink a glass of water, the water goes into you. How were we formed into the Body of Christ by this double activity? Christ put us in the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit in us.

You say, 'But please explain how that is. It's doubtless a marvellous operation, to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, and made to drink the Holy Spirit; but how's that got anything to do with the Body?'

Paul asks us to observe the human body, but in the previous verse he says: 'For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ' (v. 12). So look at this human body—the particular one that stands before you tonight, if you can bear it. It is one body but it has many members. How is this contraption kept together? By nuts and bolts, or something? How do the fingers manage to keep on and not fall off, and the feet?

You say, 'That's simple. It's the bones and the muscles.'

It isn't really; not ultimately. Not that I know anything about anatomy, but if you were to put a bullet through my head and lay me out on the floor and come back in 150 years' time, you would find some of the members had dropped off, notwithstanding the bones and the muscles.

'Why do they drop off? Do the nuts come unscrewed, or something?'

No, it's because the ultimate thing that keeps me together is the blood that's in me. It goes coursing around my veins right down to my little toe and up to my head. The blood carries the oxygen, and if the oxygen gets cut off I die. And if the blood gets cut off from my foot, it becomes gangrenous and falls off. That is the secret of the thing keeping together.

You say, 'Tell us a bit more. This oxygen stuff, where is it?'

The interesting thing is, I'm in the oxygen and the oxygen is in me. It's getting complicated now, but you're getting it free—people pay a lot of money for this in their medical schools! I'm in the oxygen and the oxygen is in me. You must have both at one and the same time. It's no good having one without the other.

You see, if you were to come up to me after this session and get me by the throat—don't, please!—the oxygen would be in me, but I wouldn't be able to get at the oxygen in the outer air and I should go black in the face. I must have the oxygen in me and I must be in the oxygen.

If you were to take me to where the Americans put rockets up into the sky, and you said, 'Gooding, we're going to send you for a ride. Sit on top of this thing here and hold tight. Take a deep breath because we're going to send you up into space and there's not a lot of air up there for you to breathe. So I take a deep breath and the rocket goes off and I go into space. What happens now? Those who know will tell me, 'You'll go 'pop', because it's no good having the oxygen in you if you're not in the oxygen, and it's no good being in the oxygen if the oxygen can't get into you. You've got to have the two.'

So, to have a human being that keeps together many members but one body, you must have the two; and you must have them simultaneously.

All believers are baptized in the Spirit

There is no such thing as a true believer who is not baptized in the Spirit; for, if you could find a believer who isn't baptized in the Spirit, that believer wouldn't be in the Body of Christ. You've got to have both things simultaneously, and that is the wonder of it. What is this great thing that Christ has done? Risen to glory, he sent his Holy Spirit and he baptized his people in the Holy Spirit. I repeat, the Holy Spirit is not some gas, like oxygen, he is a person. As the theologians do, it may be helpful to distinguish between the *person* of the Holy Spirit and the *energies* of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament simply says that we are in the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit in us.

I said earlier that when our blessed Lord Jesus ascended into heaven, the very face of heaven was changed. Never before had a glorified human being with a glorified human body been in the divine presence. That was the first major marvel of his ascension. Followed by this extraordinary thing, that the risen Christ, authorized by God, having received the promise of the Father, sent the Holy Spirit, baptized his people in the Holy Spirit, and an entity was formed that had never existed before.

You say, 'But how has that formed this Body of Christ?'

I hope you enjoy this next bit. You may not, but it's a fact anyway! If you are in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit in you, and I am in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is in me, you and I are in the same person and that same person is in us. We have the same life.

To use a faint analogy, just like the blood in my body is one second down in the feet and the other second up in the brain, and it's all one life that keeps the members together, that's why we are members of that same body. Because you're in him and he is in you, and I by his grace am in him and he is in me, we share the same life. You may not always think it could be true—that stand-offish old Englishman, how distant a man he seems; but it's true, nonetheless. We're one body in the Lord. In my heart of hearts I don't apologize for reminding you of it. If only we could get hold of it more deeply, it would solve a lot of questions without our having to think too much about them. So that's how we have been formed. It's not merely an ideal to be aimed at, it is a reality.

You say, 'I can't really believe it. I'm in the Body of Christ, and he's in the body with me? I don't feel like it sometimes. How can Christ be in heaven and I on earth, and we be joined?'

Well, how can your feet be on the floor, and your head about four feet above it? Not really difficult, is it?

From time to time for my bedtime reading I read these popular science books, written for the innocent, semi-learned public. This one was called *Wrinkles in Time*, and the good scientist, George Smoot, was telling us how he and his fellows made a tremendous discovery.

'It is now generally recognized,' so he said, 'that the galaxy we are in, planet Earth, goes round the sun, so we go twizzling around the sun every year. But the sun is one amongst billions of suns that form a group called the Galaxy. If you go out on a dark night and look up and see the Milky Way you're looking at our galaxy, edge on. It has spiral arms and goes round like the Catherine Wheels we used to play with on Guy Fawkes Night. What this scientist discovered is that the whole galaxy's not only going round, it's being drawn in a particular direction, and it is travelling in that direction over a million kilometres each hour.

You say, 'How does that come about?'

Because there is some gigantic structure, very distant from our galaxy, exerting its pull on the galaxies, so it keeps the galaxy together. But all the same it is drawing us to itself at the rate of a million kilometres an hour. Did you feel that bump last Tuesday?

You say, 'No. I didn't notice any bump.'

Of course you didn't! No one has ever felt it yet. Isn't that funny? Do you know, the more one knows about science, the easier it is to be a believer! That there can be such a gigantic power at those vast distances, able to exert its influence on our whole galaxy, to pull it at the rate of a million kilometres an hour, and we don't feel it.

We mustn't start by our feelings, you know. If we're prepared to believe the scientists, who do their delicate experiments and we just believe them, shall we not believe God and his word? How distant heaven is I couldn't begin to tell you, but the reality is there. The gracious life of the Holy Spirit of God is pulsating from the risen Lord down into me and down into you, enwrapping us all and forming us into one Body.

Because that is a reality, certain implications follow, and Paul helps us to see them by using still the analogy of the human body. I want to just point out a few of these and then we must pass on.

1. A body, by definition, is not one member, but many

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. (1 Cor 12:14-15)

If it was just one member, it wouldn't be a body. What follows from that? Take the human body, for instance: it is not one member, but many. So if a foot should say, 'Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body', that would be nonsense, wouldn't it?

To start with, how do you suppose God constructed the human body? Did he sit there on his throne and say, 'I'll design a body now'? 'I could do with a foot or two to put on this body. Are there any good feet around here? Oh, there's a foot—would you qualify as a foot, madam? No, you're not good enough; but here's a likely foot and, because you're a likely foot, I'll put you in the body.'

That's not how you get into the Body of Christ, by having a gift, or by using a gift. You don't get in that way.

You say, 'How do you get in?'

Well, I've just told you; it's by being baptized in the Holy Spirit and being made to drink of the Holy Spirit. And being in the Body of Christ and growing therein, you'll find that you will develop a gift, just like the foetus in its mother's womb develops this member and that member. That's the way round, isn't it? We don't get into the Body because we have a special gift. We first get into the Body, and then discover that God has planned us as a gift to the Body.

And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? (vv. 16-17)

That would likewise be nonsense. And the point of the analogy? Well, what Paul is going to argue is this. If somebody were to tell you that if you don't speak with tongues you are not in the Body and you haven't been baptized in the Spirit, that would be wrong. It would be utterly false. 'Do all speak with tongues?' No, certainly not. 'Do all prophesy?' No. 'Are all teachers?' Of course not.

Imagine somebody saying that if you are not a teacher you are not in the Body—that would be nonsense, wouldn't it? Why is it false to say that if you are not a teacher you're not in the Body; if you don't speak with tongues, you're not in the Body; if you don't prophesy you haven't been baptized in the Spirit?

THREE REASONS WHY THAT IS FALSE

1. 'If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing?' (v. 17). The body would be grievously defective, wouldn't it? If the whole Body of Christ was made up of teachers, it would be a curious entity and seriously defective as a body. To be a body, it needs all the gifts.
2. 'But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose' (v. 18). It would be false to say, 'if you are not a teacher, you are not in the body', because you don't have any final decision as to what gift you have.
3. 'If all were a single member, where would the body be?' (v. 19). Not only would the body be defective, you could go further and say that if they were all one member it wouldn't be a body at all. One colossal great eye is scarcely a body, is it?

So Paul regulates the mistaken emphases of the Corinthians by bringing them back to the great glorious fact of the Body of Christ, and then draws out its implications.

2. All the members are necessary for a complete body

'The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you" . . . On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable' (vv. 21–22). 'Indispensable', that is, to a complete body.

I'll tell you something about my own body. My eyes don't like gravy; especially if people splash the gravy into them. My eyes don't understand the point of gravy; they think it's horrible stuff. Do you know what? My eyes need the gravy, and mercifully in the body there's a stomach that thinks gravy is marvellous, and it's the job of the stomach to digest it and pass it on to the eyes. My eyes don't like cream buns either, nor rashers of bacon, but they need it all. And therefore, the eye can't say to the stomach, 'You're a blind alley; I don't have any need of you, nor what you go in for.'

I'll tell you a secret, if you promise not to tell anybody else. Certain people say, 'We don't care much for teaching; the gospel is the main thing.'

Oh, you don't like these chaps that go into all this detailed exposition and theology?

'No sir, I can get on without that.'

Well God bless you. But you need it, like my eyes need the gravy. And that's why God has other folks who do like this kind of stuff, and they process it and pass it on to you, whether you know it or not. Let's hope it's in a form that is palatable and gets you the vitamins.

You see, you can't say of any gift, 'I have no need of you'. All are necessary and, by God's arrangement, all are interdependent. Some folks can easily slip into that sadly wrong idea that they are so important that they don't need the others. And me, with all the theory in my head, oh how I need you and your prayers, and your encouragement and your wisdom.

3. *Some gifts are bigger than others*

One other thing. While every member (every gift, therefore) is necessary for a complete body, there are some members in a physical body that are bigger than others. You could cut off my little finger and that would be a pity because my little finger is very important. It's the gripping finger and it would be a pity if you cut it off. But I should still survive. Cut out my lungs or my liver and I shouldn't survive.

So, while all the gifts and members are necessary for a complete Body, all are not *equally* important, some are greater than others. How would you judge what is greater? Says Paul, 'But earnestly desire the higher gifts' (v. 31). 'But covet earnestly the best gifts' (KJV). If it's for the church, or a gift for yourselves as individuals, go for the bigger ones.

'What do you mean *bigger*?' says someone.

Paul explains it at the beginning of chapter 14, taking as his examples the two gifts, prophecy and tongues. He declares that prophecy builds up the church (v. 4), and therefore prophecy is greater than tongues (v. 5). Why is it greater? Because it brings more benefit to others.

On the day of Pentecost God used a miracle, and those who spoke in tongues did a marvellous job, and multitudes were brought to conviction and salvation. But why use tongues in the church when folks don't understand what is being said?

'Well, it's because I'm speaking to God.'

You may be; but if you had to choose in the church to speak to God or speak to man, which would you do?

'Well,' you say, 'I should be holy, and I would speak to God.'

But you'd be wrong. *In the church, gifts are given to benefit the other people.* You don't have to have a gift to speak to God, you know. Gifts aren't given for that purpose. All babes in Christ can speak to the Father; you don't have to be specially gifted to do that. But you'll have to be specially gifted to teach your fellow members. You don't have to be an evangelist in order to hear the gospel, believe it and get saved, do you? Of course you don't. Anybody that believes can get saved. But you have to have the gift of an evangelist if you are going to preach the gospel and lead other folks to Christ.

Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. (14:1-4)

Gifts are given so that we shall be able to help other people. The one who speaks in a tongue speaks to God, but God doesn't need upbuilding, encouragement and consolation. It's my fellow believers who do, and therefore the bigger gift is that which is able to communicate spiritual benefit to my fellow believers. That is the function of gifts, and therefore I am to seek the bigger gifts (12:31). And because that is so, Paul then talks about our motivation. 'Why should I bother to seek a gift, and if I've got a gift why should I bother to use it?'

Chapter 13

The way of love

‘And I will show you a still more excellent way,’ says Paul. Love is the driving force in the body. It’s love of the others, not love of myself, that should drive me to seek a gift and motivate me in using my gift. If I seek a gift simply for my own benefit, and not for the blessing of the other members of the Body, I am sinning against the very basic law of Christ (Gal 6:2). I must preach that to myself, mustn’t I? I enjoy preaching sometimes, but woe betide me if that were my only motive. If I preach just for the joy of it, because it profits me, and don’t do it out of love to my fellow believer, then I am worse than nothing (13:2). I have offended against the basic law of Christ.

If you’ve got a gift you should enjoy using it. There’s nothing wrong with that. I hope my hand enjoys being a hand. I work it pretty hard and expect it to do all sorts of things, and the more it works the more skilful it gets. What if it just wiggled about?

What if you were to ask your hand, ‘Why do your fingers do all that wiggling and dancing around?’ and it said, ‘Because I like it!’?

You’d say, ‘Well that’s good, but who are you helping? What other member in the body are you helping?’

‘I’m not concerned with that; I’m just enjoying being a hand.’

Then you’d say, ‘But that’s a bit odd. The Creator’s purpose in designing the hand to be in the body was so that it should help others. That is its *raison d’être*.’

So it is with every gift in the Body: it’s Designer-made to be a help to the others in the Body. God calls us in our church life to remember that our gifts are not fashion parades. They come to us because, by God’s grace, we’ve been put into the Body of Christ. May the wonder of it fill us through and through.

Divisions in the body

Then let us remember our duties, as we have seen them briefly here. When we ask ourselves, ‘Where shall we get the power from to love, to toil, to be patient, and all those other things?’ — then the answer is, ‘You are the body of Christ’ (12:27). The resource is within us and available to us. Often we forget it and go off on our own ambitious projects with self-indulgence, and then the Holy Spirit can’t empower us. We need constantly to remember that we are members of the Body of Christ, and God by his grace has put us together so that there should be no division in the Body (v. 25).

The medics tell us that there are processes in the body to fight disease and keep it free of germs and all other evil invaders. But sometimes, they say, these mechanisms go wrong and mistake the body itself for something foreign, and, lo and behold, the very mechanisms that are meant to preserve the body start eating it up and destroying it.

Chapter 14

History has shown that perhaps the biggest divisions and disputes in the Body of Christ have been caused by the specially gifted. *Personality* in human affairs is a difficult thing, and when you get two high-powered personalities you are liable to get a clash. That’s well known in the world, but it can happen in the church. Powerful gifts outside the control of the Holy Spirit

can fail to distinguish between the error that they must fight fellow members of the Body that they're meant to protect, and they begin to destroy the very Body. It could make you weep in your more serious moments, the rending of the Body of Christ by people who are specially gifted, but their gift has got out of control. May God speak to me, and then to you, lest we should mistake the goal of our gifts, which are meant to see to it that there is no schism in the Body.

Our first area of study in this first session has been chapters 12–14 of the epistle, and I have but a few minutes more to deal with the second area of fault at which the Corinthians have come. As the subject matter is so well-known, fifteen minutes will suffice for us to survey the material. Courage up—I can almost smell the tea and the coffee brewing next door, so let it nerve our faint endeavour!

2. Some were beginning to say that there was no such thing as the resurrection of the dead

Chapter 15

From chapter 15 we learn of another most serious fault that had developed in the church at Corinth. Some of them were beginning to say that, as far as they could make out, there was no such thing as the resurrection of the dead. When we first hear that, it will sound extraordinary. How could any Christian man or woman ever begin to get it into their heads that there is no such thing as the resurrection? And yet some of these early Christians at Corinth did, and were beginning to say so.

How did they come to it? I suspect in the normal way that these things happen. They were seeking, perhaps, to witness to their contemporaries. Some of them were educated and they would have read a lot of Greek philosophy and science. Be careful how you criticize it: I taught it for many years. It is good to know what the world is thinking, and not stick your head in the sand.

But there are dangers. In wanting to be intellectually respectable it is so easy to trim down Christian doctrine and judge it by unchristian standards. In many kinds of Greek philosophy it was common to say that there was no resurrection of the dead. Some philosophies, like Platonism, believed in the survival of the soul. Plato wrote a large book on the immortality of the soul to prove that the soul survives after the death of the body. Other Greek philosophers would have disagreed and said there is no survival of anything after death. The early atomic theorists, Leucippus and Democritus, and the Epicureans, would have held such a view.

The notion that there is to be a resurrection of the body would have struck most serious Greek philosophers as absolute nonsense, and if you mentioned it they might well have laughed at you, like Paul was laughed out of the Areopagus Court when he preached Jesus and the resurrection of the body (Acts 17). I suspect, therefore, that some of the Christians who tried to think—they were not wrong in trying to think—had been unduly influenced by the pressure of their intellectual contemporaries, and now were in danger of watering down the gospel.

Hasn't it happened in a remarkable way over the last 150 years? Many leading theologians in this country and in others have come to the conclusion that science makes it impossible to believe in a God who intervenes in creation, and therefore the resurrection of the body of Christ could not actually have taken place. God would never intervene in the universe and do such a thing. So they said that we must take the resurrection and demythologize it to mean any one of half a dozen things. The resurrection is simply saying that when you get down you needn't stay down. Because you believe in the resurrection you can get up again and have another go. David Jenkins (1925–2016), an earlier Bishop of Durham, was a singular example of that. He believed in the survival of the soul, but not in the literal resurrection of the body.

The sad thing about much of that stuff is that it had its rise in the science of the nineteenth century. It was never good science and it was certainly bad theology. The science that gave rise to that kind of thing has now gone by and a very new look of science has taken its place.

These people had these false ideas in their heads. How does Paul deal with it? By bringing the dear believers once more *back to the gospel*. Forgive my emphasis, but as I grow old and crotchety, the more it is impressed on my heart that the need of the church in every age is to get back to the gospel.

So here at the beginning of chapter 15 Paul spells out what the gospel is.

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (vv. 1–8)

- 'Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain' (vv. 1–2). Meaning, if the gospel is not true, you have believed in vain; but if it is true, then it's the gospel of your salvation and here are its contents.
- 'For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins . . .' (v. 3). Yes, that's true, but it isn't quite a full statement of the gospel. The gospel is 'that Christ died for our sins *in accordance with the Scriptures*'. We are not left to decide the meaning of the death of Christ for ourselves. The gospel is not that he just died for our sins; it is that he 'died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures'. It is the Scriptures, and the Old Testament Scriptures in particular, that give us the thought models by which we can analyse the significance of the death of Christ.

You see Paul at it in this epistle. 'Christ died for our sins *in accordance with the Scriptures*.' What does that mean? Let's cite one example: 'Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed' (5:7). How is that ancient scripture relevant and practical to us? That ancient Passover by

which Israel was redeemed was planned by God in his wisdom as a thought model to help us analyse the significance of the death of Christ.

I hope you are expert in the Offerings and the Tabernacle—I've a vested interest in that!¹³—and the Psalms and the Prophets.

You say, 'Why? That isn't very practical.'

Oh my good people, what do you mean, 'not very practical'? These things are planned by God to be thought models.

You say, 'What is that?'

I suspect you have watched on television while some learned scientist tries to explain the insides of an atom, and he will throw up on the screen all sorts of models. He'll tell you that they're only models, but they are to help you to envisage the atom. They're models to help you think and analyse; and God in his good wisdom has given us an Old Testament full of thought models to help us to analyse the death of Christ. That's why you hear so much of the Old Testament preached—or do you?

- Then, 'that he was buried' (v. 4). How is that relevant? Well, most of us will be buried one of these days, and he was buried as literally as we may be. This is gospel now, isn't it? Can anybody say anything to me when I come to that point and my body is put into the grave? Yes, a gospel of a Saviour who died can.
- And the gospel is 'that he was raised on the third day . . .'. Marvellous, but haven't I left a bit out? *'In accordance with the Scriptures'*. The first line of evidence for the resurrection of Christ is the Bible: the Old Testament that indicated that the Messiah would first die for our sins, be buried, and then rise again (see Isa 53). His body was a real human body, yet in the grave he saw no corruption (Ps 16:10). On the third day the processes of death were reversed and he came out of the grave. This has implications for every single man and woman.

The scientists tell us that the chemistry of the universe is practically consistent all the way through. They also tell us that our universe is liable to run down. Certainly, the sun up in the sky is running down and one day our planet will go 'phut'. In that sense we live in a dying little part of the universe.

Is there any hope for it?

Oh yes. If the chemistry of the universe is the same from end-to-end, then, if the body of Jesus Christ came out of that grave bodily, it carries an implication and a message of hope for the whole physical universe all the way through. For the promise is not only that God will raise the bodies of the dead, but one day he will restore the whole heavens and the earth. Oh, what a hope it is.

You say, 'Well you've reminded us of the gospel.'

But I've left a bit out, haven't I? For the gospel is not merely that Jesus died, that he was buried, and he rose again, according to the Scriptures—

¹³ Over many years Dr Gooding travelled extensively to give lectures on the Tabernacle. He used first of all a model which his brother Gerald constructed; and later the model made by Mr. Stanley Marshall of Armagh. The Marshall model can be seen in the video recordings of [The Approach to God](#) and [The Revelation and the Tabernacle](#) available at myrtlefieldhouse.com.

- ‘and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me’ (vv. 5–8). That’s the gospel too, isn’t it? What evidence have we got for the resurrection of the Lord Jesus? Does our gospel demand that people believe it by blind faith because their grandmothers said so?

‘No,’ says Paul. ‘The gospel is not only that Christ rose from the dead, but that *he was seen*. Here’s the evidence!’

It’s exhilarating when a preacher comes to preach the gospel in the church—or better still outside it, and preaches the evidence for the resurrection. You don’t need to preach it every time you preach the gospel, but it’s not the whole gospel unless from time to time you preach the evidence for it.

What does it mean to be a redeemed human being?

Now our time has gone and I must not weary you more. My point has been made, that to correct the faults of the Corinthian church Paul brings them *back to the gospel*. But I can’t cease without reminding you of the wonderful implication of this part of the gospel for what it means to be human.

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. (vv. 42–44)

One day, if the Lord hasn’t come, they will sow us in the ground—sown in weakness, sown in corruption (v. 42 KJV). The stench and decay of the grave is an insult to humanity. But that’s not the end of the story, for God has started again with a new kind of human being.

Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. (vv. 45–49)

The first man was a living soul and could perpetuate the race by physical reproduction, but God has long since started again. There’s a new beginning, a new Adam, a new head of the race. He generates the race, not by physical reproduction: he is a life-giving spirit.

If you are his, my good friend, he has already put his Spirit within you. And one day that very Spirit that is in you now shall take your mortal body and raise it and change it and fashion it like the body of our blessed Lord Jesus (see Phil 3:21).

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. (v. 54 KJV)

That will be the springtime. And if that is the springtime what shall the eternal summer be, when no autumn or winter will ever come again?

Question Time

Thank you for the questions that you have put in; I have a large sheath of them. I shall answer as best I can, as many as I can, though they are so numerous that I shall have to put a lot of them together from time to time and try to answer them as a group rather than individually.

QUESTION ONE

I understand you to have said that the personality of the unsaved will disintegrate in eternity,¹⁴ and you equated that with perishing. Please can you explain this more clearly?

DWG: To take one verb that is used by our Lord to describe the state of the impenitent and lost, what I meant was that they *perish*. I do not understand that to mean that they cease to exist. Rather that, among other things, if people die unrepentant they not only come under the wrath of God and his displeasure, but they suffer the consequences of their wrong choices in life.

‘Abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul’, says Peter to his fellow believers (1 Pet 2:11).

Paul talks about lusts which drown people in perdition (1 Tim 6:9 KJV), and about ‘your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires’ (Eph 4:22). He talks of others, ‘and their talk will spread like gangrene’ (2 Tim 2:17).

We shall consider then, not simply the eternal penalty of sin, but the eternal consequences of sin. If envy is allowed to go on it will overmaster a person and make him a freak of a human. If lust is unchecked, it will distort a human being’s personality for eternity. That’s what I mean.

In our life as believers we surely know the importance that confidence in the Lord plays when we are battered by difficult circumstances. When our emotions are harrowed and disturbed and tempestuous, when we meet all kinds of problems and there seems little light upon them, it’s our confidence in the Lord that keeps us together. But imagine being in eternity, and having no true confidence in God. That’s what I mean by using what is not a biblical term, I admit, ‘personality *disintegrating*’. To still exist, but what a terrible thing it will be.

‘Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are . . .’—there are the most horrible perversions that life has ever known (Rev 22:14–15). There is no magic wand that turns them into sanitized sinners. As far as I can see, what a man has sown by way of character, he shall reap.

¹⁴ See pp. 16f. [1. Man in relation to God \(chs. 1–4\)](#).

QUESTION TWO

In Paul's declaration, 'the body is for the Lord', he also says, 'the Lord is for the body'. Please explain this statement.

DWG: 'The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body' (1 Cor 6:13).

Our bodies are not just *temporary*.¹⁵ God, who raised up the body of the Lord Jesus from the dead, will raise our bodies up from the dead one of these days. The body is for the Lord, as Paul explains, in the sense that the human body is designed to be a temple of the Holy Spirit, a temple of God (v. 19). So the body is for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. That is, the Lord maintains it in his grace as a faithful Creator.

He will also transform it. He already dwells within, but oh what a marvellous thing when his eternal glory shall dwell in us, like the Shekinah glory dwelt in the tabernacle in the wilderness. There's no need of the sun: 'And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb' (Rev 21:23).

You have friends come from Timbuktu to visit, and you arrange to take them out to see the glories of the Irish countryside. When the day arrives, very often it's dark and dismal and raining, and all you can say to your guests is, 'Well, there's a marvellous scene over there, but I'm sorry you can't see it. You'll have to take my word for it!' You need the light to bring out the glory of a thing.

When you get home, my good friends, and the glory of God shall dwell in you, bringing out all those qualities that by his grace and Spirit have been wrought in you, what a lovely thing it will be. I'm looking forward to seeing you. Our body is for the Lord, to make him a temple. The Lord is for us, in that he will bestow his glory on us and use us.

QUESTION THREE

When the ministry was given in chapters 5 and 6, quite a lot was mentioned about the personality and the body. Please can we have an explanation of the difference between the body and the flesh in 6:16? 'Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh."'

DWG: I suspect the questioner means, why are the two terms, body and flesh, used in that one verse? In the context, perhaps the difference is not all that great. Paul has been talking about the body, and how the body shall be permanent—'and . . . the Lord . . . will also raise us up by his power' (v. 14). He then says, 'Do you not know that your *bodies are members of Christ?*' (v. 15).¹⁶

He's not thinking of your flesh, the stuff that your bodies are made out of, but the whole thing. The flesh is the stuff that the body is made of; the body is the thing that is composed of flesh. 'Your bodies are members of Christ . . . shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!'

¹⁵ See pp. 28f. '[2. Man in relation to his body and to marriage \(chs. 5-7\)](#)'.

¹⁶ See pp. 35f. *Ibid.*

Why shouldn't you do that? 'Do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her?' —physically so. He makes a difference between someone who's joined to a prostitute and someone who is joined to the Lord. With someone who is physically joined to a prostitute, the nature of the link is *flesh*, isn't it? He that is joined to the Lord, the nature of the link is *spirit*: 'But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him' (v. 17).

The reason why 'flesh' is used in the first place is because Paul is quoting the Genesis rule: 'For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh."' (v. 16, cf. Gen 2:24). And Adam said of Eve, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh' (v. 23). They're the same material.

As I would see it, then, 'joined to a prostitute', the method of connection is the flesh. By contrast, 'joined to the Lord', the joining point is the Spirit.

QUESTION FOUR

Please could you give a word of explanation to 1 Corinthians 7:14: 'For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.' What does that mean?

DWG: To start with, I think it is helpful to notice the verb. The unbelieving husband is made holy—*sanctified*. Now you will immediately see that you couldn't substitute the verb *justified* for 'sanctified', could you? Not in that verse.

Sometimes we use our terms carelessly. Justified, sanctified—what is the difference? But here the difference is exceedingly important. You could never say an unbeliever is justified. Why not? Because you can't be justified without faith. How is a person justified? We're justified by faith (Rom 5:1). So, to say an unbeliever is justified would be a contradiction in terms. That is absolutely impossible. To be justified he'd have to be a believer; he'd have to believe. There is a very big difference then between justification and sanctification.

Again, *the new birth*. How is somebody born again? Our Lord makes it clear: 'And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life' (John 3:14–15). You can't be born again without faith. You could never say the unbelieving husband is born again through the wife.

You can, however, say that an unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, for sanctification is not the same as justification or the new birth. It is a verb with many different levels of meaning. In the Old Testament for instance, a pot could be sanctified. If Mrs Jones lent one of her saucepans to the priests to cook some of the meat of the sacrifices in, then that pot became sanctified. She never got it back actually! You see, it had touched the holy things and therefore it was sanctified. The pot wasn't born again or justified, of course, but it was *set aside for God's use*.

What is the opposite of being sanctified? Well, something that is impure. When it comes to human relationships, and marriage in particular, forget now about being a believer or not. You can talk about a girl who's not a believer, but you could say she is a pure virgin: 'chaste' (KJV). You don't mean that she's born again; but she is pure, chaste. And marriage is meant to be, even amongst unbelievers, a pure thing. In that sense, a sacred thing. But there are perversions at that level.

Now then, suppose a woman and a man are married. She gets converted, but her husband is still an unbeliever. Is their relationship impure? 'No,' says Paul. It is still a sacred thing at that level and their children are sacred (1 Cor 7:14). They are not 'the children of whoredom', as the Old Testament would say (Hos 2:4). They are not the result of some impure perversion.

And finally, now that the woman has become a believer, she is sanctified at the higher sense, isn't she? She is set apart for God and it has a sanctifying effect on her life. Does that mean that she has to put her husband away because he has not had that experience? No, not necessarily, if he's content to live with her. She will be in that sense a sanctifying influence on him as a Christian wife, and in the sight of God their children will not be perversions or abominations or the result of an unclean relationship. They will be regarded as sacred.

That's what I take it to mean, but it gives no ground of course to believing that somehow the children of believers are automatically saved and born again.

QUESTION FIVE

'But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one' (1 Cor 5:11).¹⁷

There are two questions in connection with this verse.

1. *Not keeping company with a man who's called a brother, and not eating with him—does it primarily refer to the church? Members of the church as such are to put him away and not to eat with him; or does it include the family of that man?*

DWG: If a brother is known to be an excessively covetous man, with a very bad reputation in the world as such, or if he is a fornicator, and therefore has to be put away, does his wife, who might be a very godly woman, have to stop eating with him at home? And must all the children just throw him out, or something?

My answer to that would be, no. It refers to the church *qua* church. Why does the church have to put him away? For two reasons:

1. To deliver him to Satan (v. 5), so that by the disciplines of life he might be brought to repentance, even if it means his physical suffering. The church therefore removes its protection from him and exposes him to the attacks of the devil.
2. The church has to do it for the sake of its own and the gospel's reputations. If such a person were allowed to attend the church and members frequently indulged in social contact with him, the world outside would get the impression that this kind of serious social sin didn't matter to them. That would destroy the very reputation of the gospel. So the members of the church are not only to excommunicate him but to avoid social contact.

That said, it doesn't mean that the elders or someone so gifted shouldn't from time to time try and contact the man to help him and bring him to repentance. But mere social contact, as though it didn't matter what he'd done, is another thing.

¹⁷ See pp. 28f. [What does it mean to be truly human?](#)

In the home with his wife and children, that's another situation altogether. I don't know that the Scripture requires them somehow to put their father out at all.

2. *'Does 'not even to eat' refer to the Lord's Table or include it?'*

DWG: Well doubtless, the excommunication would exclude him from the Lord's Supper, but I suspect the phrase also includes social interaction with such a person.

First group of questions

Now we come to a group of questions that have to do in general with problems on divorce and remarriage, basing themselves in particular on 1 Corinthians 7. I shall answer them as a group generally because they cover a lot of the same ground.¹⁸

QUESTION SIX

The first says, 'I was very disappointed when you were speaking on 1 Corinthians 7. You did not read or comment on verses 10, 11 or 39. Would you kindly give your interpretation of these verses at question time? Many others who attended the meeting that night would also like to hear your views on the above verses.'

DWG: So let me do that at least, and read the passages.

To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife. (vv. 10–11)

A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. (v. 39)

QUESTION SEVEN

The next question says, 'In light of other New Testament Scriptures, such as Romans, Mark and Luke, is there any room for accepting remarriage after divorce before the death of the spouse?'

DWG: So let's read them.

For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress. (Rom 7:2–3)

And he said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery' (Mark 10:11–12).

Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery. (Luke 16:18)

¹⁸ See pp. 26f. [2. Man in relation to his body and to marriage \(chs. 5–7\)](#).

QUESTION EIGHT

We have a third question in this series. It's a letter from some good dear brother and he comments in the course of the letter on 1 Corinthians 7:27–28.

DWG: So let's read that as well.

Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned.

And the questioner says, 'A strongly favoured concept amongst some Christians is that the Apostle Paul is speaking in verse 27 about divorced persons, and verse 28 permits sinless remarriage after divorce.' And so the question to me is, 'Is that what these verses mean?'

DWG: For that particular small detail, I could comment on it as follows. As far as I am aware, those verses have nothing to do with divorce or remarriage, except in this. Paul is still answering the question, 'If you are a Christian, is marriage something that you should try to get out of because it is not a truly spiritual thing? Or, if you are now converted and your husband is still unconverted, or the other way round, are you obliged to get rid of your partner?' And the answer is, no.

'Are you bound to a wife?' — don't seek to be free, and certainly not by divorce. Carry on in the condition in which you were called (v. 27). 'Are you free from a wife?' — some people want to say that means 'have you been recently divorced from a wife?' In other words, has your wife divorced you?

But that seems to me to be certainly not a necessary translation of the Greek, nor yet a likely one. People can be loosed from a wife by death, for instance. And if a man's wife has died, isn't he now free from the marriage law of the wife and husband? What shall he do in those cases? Does it mean that if your wife has died you should never marry again?

In verses 25–28 Paul is saying, 'Well, in my humble estimation, my advice would be that it is a good thing not to get married again, but if you do get married again you have not sinned. Here is a thing which the Lord leaves for your decision. Whichever way you choose, having lost your wife or having lost your husband, whether to get married again or not, whichever way you choose is not sinful.' Paul's advice would say, 'In certain circumstances you might be wiser not to get married again but the Lord leaves it to you.'

But to say that the end of verse 27, 'are you free from a wife?' means 'have you been divorced from a wife?' seems to me to be going beyond the necessary meaning of the term.

Second group of questions

QUESTION NINE

When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? (1 Cor 6:1–2)

In light of this, is it not in defiance of God's word to seek or to be part of divorce proceedings, as divorce can only take place through the world's courts? Does it apply also to divorce, and forbids believers to go to the courts and ask the courts to divorce them?

DWG: It is a very sad thing, in terms of witness to the world, if two Christian people have to admit that the grace of Christ in one or other of them, or both, has not proved to be sufficient, and that they must divorce. That surely is a sad testimony.

On the other hand, we should remember that when you get married you can't get married simply as a private concern, nor as a thing that concerns the church; you have to get it registered with the State.

Consider this kind of example. I was hearing just recently of a good woman who married a gentleman, and a few weeks or months after they were married he told her that he wasn't a believer. He had only pretended to be a believer to get her. Now what should she do?

Furthermore, in such cases a man could go to the modern courts and complain that his wife, being a Christian, had tortured him mentally by her narrow views; and such are the liberal judges of this time that they might well decide in his favour, grant him a divorce, and give him custody of the children. Would it be a Christian thing to put up with that, and see the children consigned by the State to this ungodly deceiver and unprincipled man, and brought up in the world?

Would you think that's a Christian duty? Or would you think that the wife now should have a right to go as a Christian to the courts and explain the truth and, if not justify herself, try to keep hold of the children?

You say, 'That's a special case. That's a case where one of the people concerned is not a believer and openly admits it.'

I mentioned it to illustrate the point that, when it comes to practicalities, some of these questions are far more involved than it looks on the surface.

QUESTION TEN

We come to the central point of this set of questions. It has been well put by someone who says here: 'Along with this concept it is usually explained that adultery breaks the marriage bond. I find that whole concept tortuous and untenable against the rest of this same passage, notably verses 10, 11 and 39.'

DWG: And that brings us to the heart of the whole matter, because on this particular issue in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul quotes what the Lord said: 'To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband . . . and the husband should not divorce his wife' (vv. 10–11). What he means by saying 'not I, but the Lord' is that here he is actually quoting a command of the Lord.

When you read 1 Corinthians 7 the words might well seem (as they do to these people who have written in) to mean that divorce is not allowed whatsoever to Christian people, let alone remarriage. Divorce is not allowed; and that view has been taken all down the centuries by large sections of Christendom, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches in particular.

When you go to the Gospels to see what the Lord actually said, Mark and Luke will use the same phraseology as Corinthians does. There is no mention of any exception to this. But

it is notorious that when you come to Matthew our Lord appears to insert one exception to that blanket prohibition: 'And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery' (19:9). This verse appears to allow an exception in the case of adultery.

The age-long dispute all down the centuries, and still today, is what that exception means. Some good folks will say, 'No, Mark, Luke and Corinthians allow of no exception. They prohibit divorce and certainly, therefore, remarriage. Whatever this exception means, it can't contradict what Mark, Luke and Corinthians say.'

Those who hold that view are, of course, godly brothers and sisters. Exceedingly so. There is an equal number, perhaps more, also not worldly, lax believers, but exceedingly godly men and women, who hold the opposite view, that Matthew 19 does permit divorce under certain circumstances.

How shall it be reconciled? Now this is a very big problem and I am not going to answer it tonight. I am going to disappoint you again, and I'll tell you now why I shall not answer it. It is because the question becomes exceedingly intricate. Here I have two papers that came into my possession on this very topic, written as far as I know by a couple of Irishmen. One takes the view that our Lord does not permit divorce to believers, and certainly not remarriage. The other takes the view that, yes, there is an exception. Here each one is proving his case to you as he feels it ought to be proved in the minimum numbers of pages he could write. One has five full pages in single spacing, and the other has seven A4 pages of detailed argument.

So I am not going to try and settle the question for you tonight. It's not that I want to dodge it, but if I were to give you what I think, I would not want to be dogmatic, in the sense that I would take a view and say 'that is that', without discussing with you the views of godly men and women who take a contrary position.

We must believe what we must believe before the Lord; but when godly people who are not permissively inclined take a different view, then it is part of our task to consider their opinions and, where we cannot agree, to give reasons.

I quote just one example of what I am saying here, in the terms of that exceptive clause. 'I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality [fornication KJV], and marries another, commits adultery.'

Some have helped by saying that the way to solve the apparent difference between Matthew on the one hand (with the exception), and Corinthians, Luke and Mark on the other (that don't mention any exception), is to say that the word here translated in English as fornication is being used very, very carefully and precisely to mean pre-marital unchastity. So our Lord does allow an exception, and the exception is this. That if, after marriage, it is found that one or other has not been a virgin at the time of marriage, but has been guilty of pre-marital unchastity and hidden it from the partner, when the partner discovers it he or she has a right in this case to divorce, because the marriage was entered into under false pretences. Therefore, the party that has been lied against is not to be kept to the marriage bond because the other party told a lie.

Now that would be a very neat way of resolving it, wouldn't it? Indeed it convinces many godly people, and is a view that one should consider. However, I must trouble you for a

moment with a technicality. The word in question in Greek does not mean pre-marital unchastity. In English, 'fornication' can sometimes mean pre-marital unchastity, and after you're married sexual sin is 'adultery'. But that isn't how the words were used in the ancient world.

The word that is here translated fornication actually means 'harlotry', using the services of a prostitute. It is possible for a married believer to go astray and use a prostitute; but that is a sin that he can commit before he marries as well as afterwards. The word can also mean incest, and it can mean promiscuity—not just one act, but a constant behaviour in this ungodly fashion. In fact, if you look at the experts, you will find a list of other possible meanings as well.

I mention that simply to show why I do not come down dogmatically here tonight. To tell you what I mean I should need perhaps twenty pages, and that would take us beyond what we could possibly bear at this time of night.

One of the questioners asks if I would be prepared to discuss what I believe privately. Yes, certainly I would. And with elders in particular. I'm not an elder, you should remember that. But as far as any technical meaning of Greek is concerned and as a teacher of the word, if elders would want to hear what I have to say, then I would be perfectly glad and willing to come and put my little contribution into the pool of your thinking. But to do it tonight without being unduly dogmatic would be impossible.

I would, however, want to say one or two things, if you will allow me. In dealing with this in Matthew 19:3–9, the Lord took his hearers back to the ideal. They said to him, 'Is it all right for a man to divorce his wife for this, or that, or any other cause?' When he said, 'No,' they said, 'Why did Moses allow a man to write a bill of divorcement and divorce his wife, and marry another?' And our Lord replied, 'Moses did that for your hardness of heart, but it wasn't so from the beginning'.

So here we have three stages:

1. The ideal that was in the beginning.
2. What was permitted under the Mosaic Law, but was not ideal.
3. What is positively sinful.

Three degrees, not just two. What our Lord did was to insist that they do not be content with mere permission; they go back to the ideal.

What I want to say about that is this. In these times in which we live, the general attitude in society has become so lax and the pressures upon young people so great, that the spirit of the world so easily permeates a believer's thinking. Allow me to plead with you elders. When things go wrong you have to try and deal with them, but isn't it better to 'bolt the door before the horse gets out'? I urge elders to start training the young people. And not only the men elders, but the senior women.

In any society it's very often the women who hold the key to morality. In my youth, no respectable unconverted man would tell a rude joke in the presence of a woman. Now, if you

listen to the woman's programme on Radio 4, it is from time to time positively pornographic, and shamelessly so.

What I appeal for, therefore, is for elders to run courses on what true Christian marriage is, and what the ideal is. And, as Titus says, for the senior women to train the younger women as to what Christian marriage is, urge upon them the ideal, and not to wait until the damage is done. 'Older women likewise are to be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled' (Titus 2:3-5).

And the ideal for marriage is this, says our Lord: 'Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate' (Matt 19:4-6). What our Lord is talking about is the very institution of marriage.

What is marriage? It is not just a contract, like two businessmen agreeing to go into business together, and that's all it is, and when the contract has served its purpose, they ditch the contract and that's it over. That's business. Alas, so many marriages in the modern world follow that, don't they? 'You live together for the next six years,' says the world. 'If it works, it works; if it doesn't work, ditch it and go on for another one.'

That could easily come to be the attitude of Christian young people, couldn't it? That's not marriage in God's view. Marriage isn't a contract like that; it is the joining of two people into a lifetime union. That needs to be taught.

Secondly, allow me to point out that when things go wrong we shall need the compassion of Christ, shan't we? When he was confronted with a woman taken in adultery and they cited him the law that such a woman should be stoned, did he say 'the law of God must be kept, therefore you must stone her'? (see John 8:3-11).

You say, 'Was he going easy on adultery then?'

No. But, having the authority to do so, our Lord did not insist on the law's penalty. He said, 'I don't condemn you'. In other words, 'I'm not going to say you must now be stoned. Go, and from now on sin no more.' We shall err in our decisions when things go wrong if we don't learn that same compassion that the Lord Jesus showed.

If I may use an Old Testament example for the moment. We all cite King David as the man who taught us much about God's forgiveness. He wrote the lovely psalm on forgiveness when God forgave him not only for adultery, but for murder (Ps 51). If he had been content with adultery, that would have been a very difficult thing, because if he married the woman when her husband was still alive that would obviously be very, very wrong. When he got rid of the problem by shooting the woman's husband, he wasn't living in adultery any longer, was he? That's not a recommended solution! Ghastly, fearful, wasn't it? Dark with sin. Yet God forgave David and we sing his hymns still.

In dealing with these things that go wrong, and in our interpretation of what Christ is saying, we must remember compassion. However, I recur to the point that we must do nothing to trivialize marriage. Even in Deuteronomy 24, when a man was permitted to put away his wife and write a bill of divorcement, and they were both free to marry others, the

law of Moses says that if the second man dies and the first husband wants to take her back again he can't do that. Why not? Because, if that kind of thing was possible, it would have induced a lot of wife swapping and trivialized the whole thing.

There are two stories that I want to tell you, that will confirm to you that I'm an old bachelor.

I was approached once at a Christian conference by a gentleman, in his thirties perhaps, who had recently been converted from a life of the most lurid kind of crime, and his wife had been a partner in it. They had long since been divorced or separated, but they couldn't have cared less about that. He came to ask me about divorce and remarriage. I went through the various things that people say and both sides of the question that godly men have argued.

I said that there is no command in the New Testament that you *have* to get divorced. In some societies you would have to. If your partner became promiscuous, society would demand that you divorce that partner. If you didn't, you would be thought to be living on ill-gotten gains. But there is no command in the New Testament itself that you've got to get divorced, is there?

I said to this young man, 'Did you love your former wife? Well, now you've got converted, why don't you go and tell her that you love her and you would like her back?'

He said, 'I have, but she told me that was nonsense. I was only trying to make myself feel good.'

I said, 'That's understandable. Do you suppose she's going to believe that you have changed into an angel overnight? You will have to bear with this, and prove it perhaps over long years.'

'Ah,' he said, 'I can't wait that long.'

'Why not?'

'Well,' he said, 'there's a young lady in the meeting and she wants to marry me. The elders want us to marry, and are pushing me to marry her.'

Oh dear. Oh dear.

First Corinthians is the epistle that will tell you what your rights are. It will call upon you sometimes to forego your rights for the sake of winning other folks to Christ.¹⁹

And as for trivializing marriage, my other story concerns a great and dear friend. Because he is such a delightful Christian he's been asked to marry many young men and women. The last time I stayed with him he said, 'David, I am getting worried by this situation.'

He said, 'I married recently a fine young couple, beautiful young couple they were. Then about nine months later I got a phone call one morning.'

'It's all over,' she said.

'What's all over?'

'The marriage. It didn't work out.'

'What, in nine months?'

That is trivializing marriage, isn't it? God help us, because in our island we shall feel those pressures more as the days go by. Let us not trivialize marriage.

¹⁹ See p. 45 [Was it all right to eat meat offered to idols?](#)

On the other hand, there are circumstances, as I understand it, when divorce is not only necessary but permissible, and remarriage possibly the only thing that can be done for the best in that situation, all things considered. But my reasons for that would be many, and I cease from that now.

Finally, you have asked a lot of questions. What do you think these are on, out of the whole sixteen chapters of Corinthians? Well you've guessed right, of course. I'll answer them as quickly as I can.

QUESTION ELEVEN

In what ways do men and women differ? Could you describe the characteristics of both sexes, particularly spiritually and psychologically?

DWG: That is a serious question, and I see its seriousness. I shall not attempt to answer that tonight because, as I understand it, the question is not necessarily relevant to what I was saying on 1 Corinthians 11 about the *function* of man and the *function* of woman. Man was made first, and the woman was made for the man and from him. Man is the image and glory of God, woman is the glory of man. In other words, their function.

As far as I know, 1 Corinthians does not discuss the different qualities of male and female in that connection. It's simply dealing with the question of the function of the male and the function of the female.

To draw a slight analogy, there were days when here in Northern Ireland we had a governor. I didn't know him; he never asked me to tea! Nor did I know anything about his wife. I didn't know about their qualities as people, important as they were of course, and very relevant to certain situations.²⁰ Being governor was a question of *function*, and when it came to authority for what went on in Northern Ireland, then the governor was the one responsible to the Queen, not his wife. If things went wrong, he had to take responsibility for it: that was his function.

I understand that is what Paul is saying among other things in 1 Corinthians 11. There is a function given to the male; there is a function given to the woman.

I suspect when the governor got home, his wife sat down and he would serve the coffee, as the good man he was. Christian men should cherish their wives, like Christ loves the church. It's certainly not a question of tyranny and enslaving a woman. On the other hand, at public functions, in Queen's university for instance, when the governor came in we all stood. We were honouring the queen in his presence because it was he who represented the queen, not his wife. But if the queen had come in, he would have stood while the queen sat.

We're dealing, therefore, with public function; and as I understand it Corinthians is saying that God has given one function to the male and another to the female, whatever their personal qualities are.

Next, I have a whole host of genuine and interesting questions.

²⁰ See p. 59 '[Difference in function](#)'.

QUESTION TWELVE

*Why did I say that women praying and prophesying was on unofficial or semi-official occasions?*²¹

DWG: I've got myself into a lot of hot water there! I can answer many of your questions, if you will allow me to say this. There is an apparent contradiction between chapter 11 and chapter 14. Chapter 11 talks of women praying and prophesying. You can pray without doing it audibly, but you cannot prophesy without doing it audibly. So in chapter 11 women prayed and prophesied audibly. Whereas 14:34–35 says 'the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.'

How then do you reconcile the two?

Some people will say, 'You choose the one that's clear, and if you can't explain the other, never mind. So the one that's clear is 1 Corinthians 14, "Let the women keep silent". We don't know what the other is saying, so we go by chapter 14.'

There's always guaranteed to be some who will take another opinion. 'No, 1 Corinthians 11 is the clear one and women do pray and prophesy. Whatever chapter 14 means, we don't know, but we go by the clear Scripture in chapter 11.'

These people are all seeking to be true. They're not irresponsible.

In my youth there was one way of trying to reconcile it. 'It is shameful for a woman to speak in church'—and people used to say the word there translated *speak* means *chatter*. 'It is shameful for a woman to chatter in the church.' She can speak, if she's speaking sensibly, but not chatter, and they had the view that in the ancient Christian churches women chattered. I don't know where they got this view.

The last time I was at a service in the Jewish synagogue here in Belfast I don't know what the women did, because I wasn't allowed to sit among them. I had to sit amongst the men, and they chattered from beginning to end. When they got a bit bored with listening to the Law, they got up and went across and had a word with Joe and Jack about their holidays and the state of this, that and the other, with an occasional, *Baruch hashem* ('thank God'), just to make out that they were listening!

I don't know where the notion came from that it was only women who chattered in the early churches. It is a gratuitous insult to women. If the chattering was the problem, the men would have had to be told that they mustn't chatter either. But the word doesn't necessarily mean 'chatter' at all, does it? It's the normal word that means 'to speak'.

A more modern interpretation is to say that the verses are to be read in the light of 1 Corinthians 14:26–33. 'Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said' (v. 29). That is, let the other *prophets* judge, and some say it is in that connection, and only in that connection, that women are told they mustn't speak. They mustn't speak for the purpose of questioning the prophets.

Why mustn't they? Well, the view that was given to me at one stage was that some of these women might be married; and if their husband was one of the prophets, under the guise of questioning they might be wanting to bring him down a peg or two. Being a bachelor I didn't

²¹ See p. 60 '[2. A symbol of glory](#)'.

know what to make about that, because I didn't believe women would do such a thing! It seemed to me to be another gratuitous insult to women.

Some said, 'It's the *married* women that mustn't speak.'

Why mustn't they?

'Because if they started to speak they might interweave a little teaching and thus usurp authority over their husbands, and that wouldn't do in public either.'

What about the *unmarried* women? They wouldn't be wanting to bring their husbands down a peg or two, would they? Is it just the unmarried women, then, who are to speak in this context, not the married ones? But that would be absurd, wouldn't it? Here's a senior Christian woman with years of spiritual experience behind her, and she mustn't question? Whereas some newly converted bright young thing of seventeen may, who scarcely knows where to find the Gospel of John? It sounds a bit odd to me.

At any rate, if those were the reasons Paul would say so. When he says 'it is shameful' (v. 35), and they mustn't ask a question, he gives the reason. Not that it would be shameful for a woman to question a prophet; simply 'it is shameful for a woman to speak in church'.

I may be wrong, but in my humble estimation the contrast is between the church and the home. What women are asked not to do in the church, they're encouraged to do at home, and that will be the explanation of the apparent difference between chapter 14 and chapter 11.

So I said that, when it came to women prophesying, we could take the example of the Jewish prophetesses like Anna. They wouldn't have prophesied in the course of the temple or synagogue services, but on other occasions in that part of the temple where the public gathered. Many people gave lectures there, and it was where Anna exercised her ministry in the presence of both men and women. Why shouldn't she? It wasn't in the formal services of either the synagogue or temple, and I understand that the Christians likewise would have followed that same thing. Not in the formal services of the church but elsewhere on other occasions.

Now finally, and there are many more, but here I must let you go else you'll never speak to me again. I shall bring the questions together.

QUESTION THIRTEEN

On these other occasions, do women have to be covered in their exercise of these gifts? When is a church meeting a church meeting, and when isn't it one? In those semi-official occasions that I mentioned, when women may pray and prophesy, are they to cover their heads, and does that mean in their own homes?

DWG: My answer to that is that the matter of covering or non-covering is a *symbol*, and therefore what controls its use is a sense of appropriateness. You can take symbols to extremes where they become quite silly and inappropriate.

If you ask for clear directions, it seems to me that God has not given them. He's left the detail as to when the thing is appropriate to our good sense and spiritual understanding. For instance, it's not merely a question of when must a woman's head be covered, but when must a man's be uncovered? Perhaps I shall close by reminding you of that.

My dear sisters, think a little bit about us men. We mustn't pray or prophesy with our heads covered—not when the symbol is in force. So, when would you think it appropriate for us to pray and prophesy with our heads covered? That's a question that rises straight out of the text, and some folks have a big conscience about it.

I have known elderly gentlemen to go to funerals, and when the preacher started to pray they took their hats off. The east wind was so strong it gave them pneumonia, double pneumonia, and everything else under the sun, and the next week they were being buried themselves! That is taking symbols to a silly extreme, is it not?

What if I'm in my car at the top of the Simplon Pass and the brakes fail? I say, 'Lord, I'm going down here. Oh, half a minute, I've got my hat on!' That would be ridiculous, wouldn't it?

We must learn when it comes to symbols, to judge according to what is appropriate in the fear of the Lord, and wanting to please the Lord.

I wish I could say more. You have given me volumes more questions, such as, 'What is prophecy?' and, 'Are the gifts still available today?' and so forth and so on. I regret I haven't been able to cover them. Forgive me for that discourtesy. Rather than answer things dogmatically I have perhaps spent too long on other questions. If you are urgent to know what my views are, please telephone me or call at my address. If I can be of further help to you in these things, do make use of me, for the passages that we have been studying tell me that my chief job is to serve you. God bless you one and all.

CHAIRMAN: Thank you first of all to those who asked the questions; and Professor Gooding, as you have answered them, I'm sure you have variously educated, challenged, corrected our ignorance, and, above all, stimulated our thinking. Indeed, if that's not so, the fault will be ours and most certainly not yours. But what is certain is that you have answered most graciously and, above all, with great wisdom.

Thank you for being with us, and to all who are here this evening, thank you very much indeed for coming. I'm going to ask Professor Gooding just to commend us all to the Lord as we leave.

Blessed Lord Jesus, we thank thee for these times together, for thy holy word, for the desire to study it, and for the help of thy Holy Spirit and his illumination.

And now, Lord, we turn from that to thee, for the day is far spent. Much we have heard, much we have listened to, much we will in the immediate future forget; preserve in our memories, we pray, those things particularly that thou art concerned that we learn at this time. Preserve in our memories the awareness that thy word does have answers, so that against times yet to come, when we need it, we may know where to look.

Above all, blessed Lord, grant us that we may love thee, that in thy word we shall see thy glory, and as we come ever nearer to thee, help us to love thee with all our hearts and with all our minds. Tonight, Lord, come in with us, that we may know thee in that intimate fellowship of hearts. Be thou the joy and the song of

our pilgrimage as we journey home. These things we ask for thy greater glory and for thy name's sake. Amen.

Chart*Major sections in 1 Corinthians*

1. Chapters 1–4: Man in relation to God

Danger: Man's confidence in man rather than in God

Answer: The cross: Christ crucified; the wisdom and power of God

1:9—GOD IS FAITHFUL

2. Chapters 5–7: Man in relation to his body and to marriage

Danger: Desecration of the Holy Spirit's temple

Answer: Passover and unleavened bread; Christ sacrificed; bought with a price, not your own

3. Chapters 8–10: Man in relation to God

Danger: Idolatrous disloyalty to God

Answer: The table of the Lord; God's jealousy

10:1—GOD IS FAITHFUL

4. Chapter 11: Man in relation to Christ

Danger: Disloyalty to headship and lordship of Christ

Answer: A new regime

5. Chapters 12–14: Man in relation to the Body of Christ

Danger: Infringement of love

Answer: A new entity

6. Chapter 15: Man in relation to Christ, the Second Man: Man's true evolution

Danger: Denial of the resurrection of the body

Answer: Back to the gospel

About the Author

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