

# **The Church, its Conduct and Activity**

*Studies in First Corinthians*

*David Gooding*

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## Does 'Church Truth' Matter?

### *I Corinthians 1–4*

Let us begin by reading from the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. In this session we will be studying the opening chapters together, not in close detail, but seeking rather to come at the spiritual principles according to which Paul seeks to answer some of the problems that arose in this Christian church.

Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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. I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgement. 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? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.' 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. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

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.' (1:1–31)

May God give us good understanding of his holy word.

The subject, which in some quarters is called the *theology of the church*, and in other quarters is called *church truth*, is perhaps one of the thorniest in all the New Testament and in all Christian experience. The divisions that have arisen over this matter are responsible for more divisions amongst Christians than any other topic. As Christian people, we are aware of the sad bitterness—amounting at times to positive persecution—that has arisen from differing opinions amongst Christian people on the topic of the church. We are all painfully aware of the scandal of this thing—the sorry, divided, self-destroying kind of situation that the church appears to be to the world outside. It is therefore quite understandable that many people, particularly of evangelical persuasions, have long since come to the conclusion that this is a topic far better left alone, so that one might concentrate on the positive work of spreading the gospel and bringing men and women into the kingdom of God. If people thereafter must meet in churches, let them be free to go according to their own taste; but have the decency not to discuss the matter, not to argue the matter, and certainly not to take it very seriously.

I well remember this particular attitude being put to me in a way which, at the time, was rather traumatic, so much so that I remember it to this day. I was ascending from the bathrooms in Hughes Court in Trinity<sup>1</sup>—not a time to talk theology!—when I met a great friend. He was a man of God, whom I admired exceedingly for the gift of soul winning which God had given him, and for his faithful use of it: he was a tremendous testimony around the university. He met me, as I say, so recently ascended from the bath, and informed me that he was finishing at the end of term, so we wouldn't see each other now for a while. I asked him what he was going to do and he told me. Then presently he asked me what I was going to do and, without allowing me to reply, he said, 'You know you ought to take a church and teach.' Then thinking to himself, he added, 'Oh, yes, but you hold some curious views on the church, don't you?' I said that I didn't know I held curious views, and he replied by listing some of the things that he regarded curious in me. Rather than prolong a conversation about details in such an inappropriate position and condition, I thought I would support what seemed to me to be fundamental in this matter.

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<sup>1</sup> Trinity College, Cambridge University.

### **Personal taste or scriptural principle?**

I said, 'Actually, I think my position is not all that curious. It is simply this: that where Scripture speaks on these matters—in many places of course it doesn't—but where Scripture speaks, it is final and authoritative.'

'Oh, nonsense,' said he. 'When it comes to how we proceed in our churches, we are free to do as the occasion demands, or as policy dictates. If history takes a turn and it seems good to us that the church should be joined with the state, it's the right thing to do to join it with the state. If presently history takes another turn and it doesn't seem advantageous to be joined to the state, we can divorce the church from that state. We're perfectly free to do as occasion demands.'

That raises a very big issue. Is it the fact that when we come to the question of how we run our churches, we are free simply to do as occasion demands? Immediately of course, my mind would go to such Scriptures as you find later in this particular epistle where Paul, having talked about sundry matters, adds:

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)

That is perhaps only a straw in the wind, but evidently in the apostle's day he expected his converts, and the churches in general, to regard what he said about their conduct as a command of the Lord.

I also find it helpful to observe what the New Testament says about the nature and purpose of the church. It certainly is a subject that we cannot avoid. We cannot take the view that so long as we give ourselves to evangelical work and bring men and women into the kingdom of God, we can afford to neglect this matter of what we are to do about the church, about church fellowship and so forth. On the contrary, our experience in the church is designed by God to be an integral part of our salvation. Let me hurry to explain what I mean.

### **The nature and purpose of the church**

If we ask ourselves why God has saved us, the stock answer is that 'we are saved to serve', and who could find fault with that, I wonder? But then, just a moment; we shall have to define that a little bit more. You mean we are saved in order to serve God by preaching the gospel and getting other folks into the kingdom? Very good. What will we do when the last person has been converted? Will we be left with no other reason for being saved? Well of course not. In 1 Corinthians 3, and in such passages as 1 Peter 2, the apostles indicate one of the goals of our salvation.

### **The purpose of the church—a spiritual house**

One of the goals of our salvation, according to the New Testament, is that Christian people are being built together into a temple that is steadily growing, in which God might dwell and through which God will make himself known, both in this age and the age to come. They are being built together as a temple, or a spiritual house, that they might exercise their ministry

toward God, for, as you might expect, God is the goal of our salvation. One of the subsidiary things in our work for God will be bringing other men and women into this same knowledge of salvation, but even in that aspect, God is its goal. We are bringing these men and women to God, and any idea and concept of salvation that does not have God as its final goal is inevitably and invariably inadequate.

Hence, therefore, we cannot neglect this matter of the church. It is one of the church's prime functions now, as it will be eternally, that people meet together, are brought together and are built together—a spiritual house of priests to undertake a spiritual ministry towards God. Obviously, if this matter of the church is so intimately bound up with the goal of our salvation—I say 'obviously', but it seems to me quite obvious—I would expect that God hasn't left its arrangement altogether to our whim and fancy.

### **The purpose of the church—a channel of God's grace**

In the second place, we could observe from other Scriptures that a good deal of God's grace towards us is, by God's deliberate design, mediated to us through other members of the church. I think of passages like 1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14; of Romans 12; and of Ephesians 4, where the Holy Spirit is at pains to point out that a great deal of God's grace, and indeed his saving grace, comes to us not directly, so to speak, from God to us; it comes mediated to us through the fellow members of the Body, through the other members of the church. If that is so, it is understandable that God and his apostles would be exceedingly concerned to correct any tendency, in behaviour or organization, that would interfere with these channels of supply. God has ordained that part of your salvation—part of his grace that will bring you strength to resist temptation and bring you into a deeper knowledge of God—is to be mediated to you through other members of the church, and he has provided a plurality of such gifts within the church. God will not therefore look kindly on any organization that prohibits the function of a good many of those members and so narrows the channel of the supply of his grace to you.

### **The pattern for the church**

So again, it would seem to me, as I survey one or two general concepts in this matter of the church, it is not likely that God will leave it to our whim and fancy what we do. It is most likely that he will to some extent prescribe for it, because the way we organize our churches in the end will have an impact on our grip on salvation. For example, it is the plain statement of holy Scripture in a number of places—Acts 20, or 1 Timothy 3, or 1 Peter 5—that God in his wisdom has seen fit and necessary that his people should be provided with shepherds.

God likens his people to sheep who, if they are to prosper in health and not be chased hither and thither at the mercy of wild beast and enemy, must be provided with shepherds to guide them, and sometimes to discipline them. And if God has made provision for me, in my weakness, that men appointed by him—of fatherly heart and spiritual experience—should supervise my life and guide and shepherd me, it would be arrant impertinence on my part to say to God, 'I don't need such men'. Of course not, it is an integral part in my salvation—if I may use that term in its broader sense—that I should cherish and submit to those gracious

provisions of shepherd care that God has instituted in the church, setting his bishops, or overseers, or elders, call them what you will, in each company of his people.

### **The testimony of the church**

Finally in this general survey, not only do we have churches because, by the mediating of God's grace through the members each individual's salvation is promoted, but there is also the question of the church's testimony in the world. I think, for instance, of such a passage as 1 Timothy 3, where the church, the household of God, the church of the living God, is described as 'a pillar and buttress of the truth' (1 Tim 3:15).

If I might borrow an analogy and an illustration from Solomon's temple, house of the living God once more, there were standing in the court just outside the porch, for all comers to observe, two pillars; and on their tops were beautiful capitals, carved and adorned with pomegranates and chequer work and there they stood in all their glory, upheld by these two pillars, presumably for decoration and attraction, let alone what deeper symbolism they may have had in God's mind when he instructed the architects to make them. So is a church. It has a role to play to the outside world that it shall be a pillar and buttress to hold up the truth. Because that is so, Paul lays it down quite firmly to Timothy that elders and deacons in the church must be this and they must be that, and they must do this and they must do that, because of the tremendous dignity and solemnity of the responsibility that is given to each individual Christian church to be a witness for God in the world.

### **The practical details**

But someone will say, 'Granted all that, does it really matter in the smaller details how we run our churches? Couldn't we do all those things and still be left, in many particulars, to our own devices to decide?' Well it is the evident fact that in the multitude of details, God has left his churches to decide—never independently, we hope, but with a conscience and mind exercised to seek God's will and the direction of his Holy Spirit. But if the New Testament Scriptures are the confines of your investigations, you will search them in vain for any direction as to how long the *breaking of bread* should take, what form of introduction there should be, or what should follow it; or whether you should have one meeting of the church per week, or a half a dozen. It is the fact that many details which have been adopted and observed rigidly by many Christians, have no authority in the New Testament, either for or against. Where God has not legislated, I personally presume that each church is free to act in the fear of God.

### **Fundamental principles for the church**

But my main thesis tonight is that, whereas there are multitudinous details in which God has left us free to decide according to each local need and occasion, there are, on the other hand, deep lying and fundamental spiritual considerations that will most definitely control us. Considerations to which every proposed scheme of organization will have to bow, and any mode of behaviour will have to bow because, as I say, our experience in the church is first and foremost an experience of divine persons. Anything that interferes with or detracts from our

experience of our relations with these divine persons, you will find the New Testament outlaws it. And anything that restricts the movements of the Holy Spirit in ministering the grace of God to us, these things too you will find outlawed. Let me take one more simple illustration.

### **The exercise of gift**

I recur to something I have already mentioned. When Paul comes to discuss the ministry of the church in chapter 12, he says that the gifts function in the church in the manner of the members of a human body. Not all are prophets, not all apostles, not all have the gift of tongues and certainly not all have the gift of healing; not all are teachers and not all are evangelists. But there is a multiplicity of gift—each gift given by the Holy Spirit and under his control (see vv. 4–11). Now I ask you to observe that this notion that in each church there is a multiplicity of gift which must have freedom for its exercise, is not something that the liberal wing of the church thought up—prompted by proletarian democracy or something of the kind. This isn't an idea that we are free to scrap if it occurs to us that possibly some other system might prove better. We are not free to scrap it. It is an integral part of our salvation and of our relation, not only with one another, but with the blessed Holy Spirit. How did you come to be members in this body, if not by the very baptism of the Holy Spirit? You can't be allowed to scrap what the Holy Spirit has brought into existence, what Christ has brought into existence, what God has brought into existence, with deliberate care, by baptizing people in his Holy Spirit. That would be putting aside an integral part of our relationship with God, an integral part of our salvation.

### **The problem at Corinth**

Now I want to take that general kind of underlying thesis, that underlying principle, and deal at some length with a problem that arose in the church of Corinth. I'm concerned to point out not merely that the thing was bad and that it was banned, but to point out the reasons the Apostle Paul outlines, and the kinds of considerations that move him, in protesting against this particular form of behaviour which began to appear in the church of Corinth. I'm much more concerned to get across this basic notion that the organization of our churches is a matter that must be watched very, very carefully—so that it doesn't foul any of these basic spiritual principles which are permanent and eternal—than I am to try to correct the superficial things that one or another might feel wrong in the present state of the church.

### **Sectarian divisions**

The unfortunate behaviour pattern which was beginning to emerge in Corinth is the one we read of in chapter 1, where people were beginning to divide themselves up in sectarian spirit and say, 'I follow Paul'; 'I follow Apollos'; 'I follow Cephas'; 'I follow Christ'. Now it is patent that that kind of thing is wrong and is outlawed—both the underlying sectarian spirit and the external labels which go with it. This matter of taking the names of some prominent servant of Christ and manoeuvring oneself around him in a kind of spiritual clique, this itself is wrong within a church. How much worse, one might say, to do it on the grander scale and organize



whole strings of churches on that same principle. That is wrong, as I say, and you'll not need me to labour the point. It must not be done. It is a defiance of holy Scripture if I take to myself a name that is not common to all Christians.

You say, 'This is a very small matter, surely.' Well perhaps it is, but I notice that Paul spends four chapters over it. If you would care to look at the text of your Bible you will see how Paul does in fact spend four whole chapters on this problem. That he is talking about it in chapter 1 is obvious. In chapter 2, he seems to go off and talk about the Holy Spirit, but you'll observe that he hasn't digressed to forget his subject altogether for, in the opening words of chapter 3, he recurs to the topic. Verse 3: 'for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, "I follow Paul", and another, "I follow Apollos", are you not being merely human?' and so on. And when he comes to the end of that chapter he is still talking of this same topic.

So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. (vv. 21–23)

You will observe that in chapter 4, he is still and again talking of this matter.

I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favour of one against another. (v. 6)

A topic which takes up four solid chapters of an inspired New Testament epistle cannot surely be a topic of minor importance.

### **Vital considerations**

What I would like us to do now, briefly, is to get some bird's eye view of the kind of arguments Paul uses against this thing. What kind of considerations does he bring to bear on it? First of all, let us observe in chapter 1 his first indignant protest that anybody should do any such thing. Says he,

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1:13)

#### **The unique glory of Christ**

In a word, he will outlaw this whole system of behaviour by pointing out to us that it is derogatory to the unique glory of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Let none say that it is an innocent little matter, if your supposed innocent little matter detracts from the unique glory of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

'Was Paul crucified for you?' You can hear the shock of the suggestion has almost taken his breath away. 'Who is Paul?' Well yes, who is he? He might be a mighty man of God, he might be the man that God has used to bring you into the light of God's salvation. But when

all is said and done, it is one thing to preach about Christ; it is another thing altogether to be Christ. To expound the significance of the atonement is a very blessed thing, but it doesn't begin to be in the same category as to be the atoning sacrifice itself. Between the preacher and the gospel preached, between the servant who preaches the cross and the Lord who died upon that cross, there is an impassable gulf. How would it ever occur to anybody to bracket two names together, still less to substitute some other name for Christ's name?

#### *No other name*

You say, 'Come off it. It's only a little thing. What's in a name?' Perhaps it is a little thing. I'm not so sure. You'll think me absurd when I say this, and utterly ludicrous—but let me be ludicrous then! Suppose your name was Smith. Now in your bachelor days, you had a good friend by the name of Brown. One day, Brown did you an exceedingly good turn. He introduced to you a charming lady who eventually became your wife. She became Mrs Smith. One day she was rummaging in her handbag and on to the floor there dropped a visiting card and, being a very good gentleman, you picked it up; and as you picked it up, you read it: 'Mrs Brown-Smith'. You say, 'My dear, whatever is this? "Mrs Brown-Smith"?' 'Oh,' she said, 'there are lots of Smiths in this world, and you must make some distinction, mustn't you? So I call myself by the name of the man who introduced me to you.'

I wonder how many of you husbands would regard that as a little matter of no significance! I submit to you, we wouldn't take the view that names are only small things when it came to that little matter. Will you publicly take the name of the man who led you to Christ and let yourself be known in the world by that name, whether in addition to or in place of the sole name of Jesus Christ, our Lord? No, surely you won't, not if you have any concept of the uniqueness of his person and of his work, who was crucified for you. Why should we take names thus and group ourselves in little groups with labels less than are common to all God's people?

### **God's deliberate strategy**

#### *A 'foolish' message*

As far as I can see it, the next reason he gives and that occupies, by and large, the rest of chapter 1, is that such a practice is not only derogatory to the unique glory of Jesus Christ our Lord, but it is utterly contrary to the deliberate strategy of God. Says Paul,

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (vv. 17–18)

Although it appears to be folly, it is part of a very deliberate strategy on God's part. It isn't the case that God set the gospel going and now, all these centuries later, he begins to think it's a little bit outmoded and doesn't really match up to modern things, and therefore it ought to be changed. God knew from the very first it sounded foolish. He deliberately chose that message.

Paul observes that in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God by its wisdom (1:21). The world's wisdom, by itself, is quite unable and inadequate to bring a man to God,

to bring a man to repentance, to bring a man to eternal life. God has deliberately chosen a message which will force upon men the realization of the difference. This is not a humanly-devised message. No man would have dared to invent such an absurd thing. Of course, God isn't ashamed of it, because God's apparent folly is wiser than men; and his apparent weakness is stronger than men anyway. And the gospel works—it is in fact the power to salvation. God isn't particularly ashamed of it. He reckons he's got more converts through his gospel than people have got through atheism. I mean, real converts—people who have had a spiritual revolution, have been saved from sinning, whose lives have been cleaned up. It works.

#### *'Weak' messengers*

And then God has been deliberate in the instruments he has chosen. The verses from 26 to the end of that chapter show us that God has deliberately chosen foolish things, apparently so.

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. (v. 26)

That oughtn't to surprise you or stumble you. This is deliberate policy on God's part.

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; and 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. 27–29)

Summing up then this deliberate strategy, says Paul, by inspiration—and as you read it, notice the order of the words, deliberately so put in their original language that we catch the emphasis:

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption. (v. 30)

The operative words are *of him*, that is, not by somebody else. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus. And then, as if that were not enough, he says that he became to us wisdom *from God*. It's by him and from him with this deliberate intention that, according as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord' (v. 31).

In a word, I want to suggest that in this paragraph Paul is pointing to God's deliberate strategy, to make it evident to every individual that his being placed in Christ was altogether of God. If God had used some eminent means, if God had trusted in men's wisdom then, having found yourself in Christ, you might have looked back and supposed that your position in Christ was in part due to the eminence of the man who brought you to him, of the wisdom of the man who preached the night you got converted, and what a damage to your soul that would be. I'm glad my conversion doesn't rest on the cunning argument of some gospel preacher.

You've all heard the story, I suppose, of that famous Methodist preacher, a great man of God he was, up in the coalmining district of east County Durham—a man used of God to lead

multitudes of men and women into salvation. Like all preachers, under his ministry he had people who professed salvation but were not genuine; and they soon showed it by the way they behaved. He saw such a man coming out of a pub on a Sunday afternoon. As the man slouched up the street, he met the preacher. 'Ah,' he said, 'I'm one of your converts.' The preacher replied, 'You must be, otherwise you wouldn't be walking like that.'

If your salvation rested on the appeal or charm of the evangelist, you might well quake in your shoes, because even evangelists get grey hair and go bald! If your salvation and being in Christ rests on the fact that you met a very clever man who could beat all the atheists' arguments, and that's all it is, you might very well have good reason to fear. Because one of these days you might meet such a clever atheist who could out-argue the evangelist. Then what would you do? God has so ordained it that when you get saved, you will see that the instrument was as nothing, and that you are in Christ because God put you in Christ. And all those great resources that Christ has—wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption—became realities to your soul because God made them realities: it was from God they came.

That being so, you can see how Paul is advancing this as a reason why you should not take any other name than Christ's—lest it direct you to put your faith in any part in the instrument that God used to bring you to Christ. God demands that he remain the sole object of your faith and confidence, so that your confidence should be in God and in no other.

### **The witness and work of the Holy Spirit**

I want to suggest that in chapter 2, Paul is in fact urging another argument related to this general theme, though he might not superficially appear to be. He comes now to the work of the Holy Spirit. He has talked of the matter in relation to the glory of Christ. He has talked of the matter in relation to the strategy of God. He will now talk of the matter in relation to the Holy Spirit. I wonder, do I make part of my general thesis clear, that you have to be very careful how you organize the church, lest it detract from our relationships with the divine persons?

In chapter 2, Paul observes that when he came to them, he did not come with men's wisdom. He came with a message that seemed to be foolish:

that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (v. 5)

Then he adds that God's wisdom is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, for the rulers of this age were so ignorant in their way that, when they had the Lord of glory before them, they failed to recognize him or to see beyond their noses what a strategic mistake it was on their part to go and crucify him. If they had seen what were the blessed outcomes of this piece of God's strategy in allowing Christ to be crucified, they never would have crucified him; but being short-sighted as they were, they went and crucified him to their own eventual undoing.

This wonderful wisdom is not available to the world and is beyond human imagination but, says Paul, God has revealed these things to us who, by definition, are mere nothings—not the mighty nor the great in this world. So how is it that believers can understand them

when the world can't understand? Judas (not Iscariot) asked the Lord that question outright when the Lord was saying, 'I will manifest myself to you. I shall rise again from the dead and I will manifest myself to you.' And Judas asked him, 'Well what exactly do you mean, Lord, when you say you will manifest yourself to us and yet the world won't see you? How can it possibly be?' (see John 14:21–23). The answer is, of course, that the things of God are only disclosed in their fullness by the Spirit of God.

For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. (2:11)

If therefore a man is to understand the deep things of God, it will be solely, in the last analysis, by the Holy Spirit.

Now please do not take out of what I say that I'm against education or the use of our intellects. Far from it. To use a crude analogy, there are all sorts of intellects and I suppose all of them are good. There are different grades of them. You might liken them on the one hand to a Rolls-Royce and on the other, to a Mini, perhaps. But neither a Mini nor a Rolls-Royce will go without petrol. If I had to choose between a Mini with a tank full of petrol and a Rolls-Royce without any petrol as a means for getting somewhere, I hope I would have the sense to choose the Mini with a tank full of petrol! And even if the Rolls-Royce eventually got its petrol too, and the owner got there before me in my Mini, he'll only get there, and so will the Mini eventually. Our intellects may differ. God wants us to use these gifts that he has given, but let us have the sense to see that in the last analysis, it's the 'petrol' that matters. You thought the illustration very crude, didn't you? Well it isn't so crude actually, because the Lord Jesus would have used olive oil perhaps, as an illustration of the matter and not petrol! He talked about some good virgins that had oil in their lamps—perhaps that's a better analogy to use—and some virgins that didn't have any oil (Matt 25:1–13). When it comes to understanding the deep things of God, you can have a Mercedes-Benz of an intellect, but if you haven't the Holy Spirit you will understand nothing.

Allow me another illustration to get the point emphasized and underlined. The world cannot receive it. These things have got to be received by people who are spiritual. They have got to be communicated to them by the Holy Spirit of God. A worldly person who does not have the Holy Spirit will not see it. I could take something into your lounge and show it to you without your dog seeing it, even though he was looking at it. You say, 'What do you mean?' Well I could show you all the wealth of character in a portrait by Rembrandt. I could show that to you with your dog looking at it, licking it if you let him, and you would see it and he wouldn't. Why wouldn't he see it? Because he hasn't got a human spirit. Now when it comes to God's wisdom, it will take the Holy Spirit to reveal it.

#### *Behaviour that detracts from the role of the Holy Spirit*

'Why all this fuss, Paul?' Well, when we turn to chapter 3 Paul says, 'I . . . could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ' (v. 1). How was it that they were in that condition? Because by their behaviour they had begun to foul this cardinal principle that spiritual growth depends completely, eventually, on the Holy Spirit's power and illumination. 'For when one says, "I follow Paul", and another, "I follow Apollos", are

you not being merely human?' (v. 4). Without intending maybe, they had taken the focus of the believer's outlook and, without noticing it, they had moved these things away from that blessed Holy Spirit and focused it on certain instruments and men.

It is a guaranteed way to spiritual impoverishment if we take a believer's expectation and the focus of their outlook and confidence away from his living Holy Spirit in the church and we focus it on the men. It's a very subtle thing, but it is a spiritual consideration, and when it comes to the way we run our church, it is the spiritual considerations that must be paramount. 'You must not therefore,' says Paul, 'call yourselves after the names of men, nor group yourselves round them, for that would take away the believer's focus from the Holy Spirit.'

### **Other considerations**

#### *The 'temple' of the assembly*

There are sundry other reasons. I will endeavour to go through them very briefly. Let us look at the paragraph that goes from verses 10–17 of chapter 3, where Paul likens the assembly to a temple. He says that in that temple, the foundation is Jesus Christ (v. 11); the Holy Spirit is the divine occupant (v. 16); and God himself is its divine proprietor (v. 17)—it is God's temple. So then this assembly at Corinth likewise has Christ as its foundation; its occupant is the Holy Spirit; and its owner and proprietor is God. He therefore warns his fellow believers against doing anything to spoil or injure that temple, because to injure what is other people's property is bad manners, to say the least. The assembly—a Christian church—is not just a place of convenience where we go along. It's not even our place, so to speak, where we are at liberty to do as we please. A church is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit its occupant and God its proprietor.

I go into many homes and I suppose, as you do, I have my own ideas on how homes should be run and how the furniture should be placed. I find myself saying sometimes, 'If I were in this home, I wouldn't have that here: I would move it there.' Suppose I came to stay with you one of these nights and as soon as I walked into the lounge, I went over and got your hi-fi, or whatever it is, and lifted it up and shifted it to the other side of the room. You would say, 'What charming eccentricity the man has!' But if when you came down to breakfast the next day, you found the washing machine removed from the utility room up into the first bedroom, and one of the comfortable chairs of the three-piece suite out in the kitchen, you wouldn't any longer regard it as charming eccentricity. You would feel highly outraged.

It's your home, you bought it, you permitted me to come on sufferance. It's not mine to do what I like with. My brothers and sisters, would you treat a church of God like that? 'Don't take names,' says Paul, 'please don't. And don't start grouping believers into little cliques like this, around different men.' Well what would he say when he sees how we've done it in the bigger realm? You don't do it, because those believers are not yours to do it with. If you interfere with God's assembly like that, God will destroy you, says Paul.

#### *The building materials*

Do you notice the context of these often-quoted verses about wood, hay and straw? You can't alter the foundation, but you can build on it. I know it is a general thesis, but if I were to build the wood, hay and straw of denominationalism in this sense into God's church, God says it's

rubbish which he will burn up as totally unacceptable (see 3:12–15). Oh, but you say, 'It works in the world.' I have indeed heard that argument advanced. It works in the world of politics, they say, and by each party pushing its particular insights and ideas, the great common good is achieved. So does it follow that it would work in the church?

One man sees the tremendous importance of justification by faith, so do you think it's a good thing if a lot of churches group themselves together around the man who has this insight, and label themselves the 'Justification by Faith Churches'? Or another man can see the tremendous importance of the sanctifying power of the prophetic doctrines about our Lord's advent, so do you think it's a good thing if he sets up a whole group of churches and calls them 'The Second Coming Churches'? And by each group of churches following their own insight, so the common good is achieved? Is that an argument you favour? I've heard it advanced.

Well I wouldn't dispute that it may seem wise by worldly standards, but would you hear God's comment on that kind of argument?

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. (3:18)

There's no argument that it worked in the world and therefore it should work in the church. For we're back where we started. When it came to saving men, to regenerating them, to bringing them out of the grip of sin, to sanctifying them, human wisdom was no good and God had to use a message that seems foolish. And when it comes to running the churches, there will be places along the line where God will ask you to observe the same kind of pattern. What the world would use in its wisdom, God doesn't use; and he asks you to become a fool and submit to his wisdom.

#### *Demeaning behaviour*

Finally, two other things before I stop. As Paul puts it at the end of chapter 3, the taking of names in this fashion demeans people. He says,

So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. (vv. 21–23)

Well then, don't go and demean yourself by following men. If you found the little son and daughter in some lordly household falling to blows as to whether the gardener or the laundress was the best, you might—if you were his lordship or ladyship—remonstrate with them, 'Oh, come, they're all good in their way, but you mustn't tear each other's hair out about that kind of thing, for they're only your servants and they're all yours.' Paul says, 'If you are children of God and all things are yours, it's a sadly demeaning thing that you should quarrel and be puffed up one against another over people that are mere servants.'

#### *Labelling the servants*

'What is more, please don't do it,' says Paul, 'for you make life harder for the men themselves. "For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all"' (4:9). Look at the persecution we

endure and on top of it our responsibility as stewards to be found faithful. One man, like Peter, has a very practical ministry. Another, like Apollos, is a veritable orator. Paul is a tremendous intellect.

Don't you know what happens in the church? Some people who are tremendous intellects will gravitate to the Pauls; and some people who like practical stuff and are always telling preachers, 'Now, be practical,' will gravitate to the Peters. Those who don't mind what the preacher says so long as he says it in a good voice and with great oratory, will gravitate to the Apolloses of this world! They make it very difficult for some. Poor old Paul was contemptible in speech. To him was committed a ministry and he daren't do otherwise than preach it. But, being human, it would have been a great temptation—when the crowds all went off to hear Apollos or Cephas or somebody else—to be disloyal to his stewardship and, to put it bluntly, play to the gallery. No, we would do wiser than to follow men in that way; and we would be kinder, not least to the servants of God themselves.

## Conclusion

My long discourse is at an end. I hope I've made the general principle clear. It is not merely a matter of correcting this abuse, though it does have many implications, and you may want to question and think and talk about those implications. But my thesis for the moment has been to ask us to observe the kind of considerations that Paul brings to bear on this exceedingly practical problem. For that, it seems to me, is the kind of consideration we must always bring to bear on the way of running our churches.

Let us pray.

Now Lord, we thank thee once more for thy holy word. We rejoice in its wisdom. Oh, God, humbly, we who are but nothings, do praise thee for thy sovereign mercy, that thou hast chosen us of deliberate choice, not for good or greatness in us, but that all these staggering blessings that thou hast given us might be seen to come from thee; that our hope and our confidence may be solely in thee. We pray, oh Lord, that thou would give us wisdom to listen to the urgings of thy Holy Spirit and in our churches help us to do nothing that in any way will detract from the honour of Christ, or take away from our relationship with divine persons. As we think about these things, give us wisdom so that we might know how these broad principles apply to our own personal situation. And give us the grace, not only to be obedient, but the faith to trust thee that thy ways are indeed best and thy wisdom superlative. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



## Church Government and Discipline

### *1 Corinthians 5–8*

I want to push ahead in this session with our study of 1 Corinthians and allied Scripture, looking at New Testament principle and practice. We begin by reading 1 Corinthians 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. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgement on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. 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. 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. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. 'Purge the evil person from among you.'

For all I know, some of you may be screaming inside, feeling that this is largely irrelevant, that it is a counsel of perfection and idealistic. This was what happened in the remote past, but now in the realities of this modern world with centuries of development between the New Testament and us, it is no longer practical and the counsels of the New Testament are no longer capable of being put into practice. Is it not therefore largely irrelevant to spend time considering these principles and the practice of the New Testament?

It is indeed the fact that there has been a colossal amount of development in the church, nowhere more so than in the topic that I want to raise this morning—the topic of church government and discipline. But then it seems to me that our views on this matter will partly be coloured by how we regard holy Scripture. Whether we regard these particular Scriptures as little more than museum pieces that we may read and say, 'Well, how interesting. Is that

how they did it? Now of course we do it differently, but how interesting they did it that way.' The question is whether we regard holy Scripture as binding or authoritative. Hence my emphasis in our first session to try and develop the thesis that it is not merely the individual things which Paul corrects that are important, but more important is the kind of consideration he brings to bear on the topic. It is my contention, as you have already seen, that the kind of considerations he brings to bear upon each difficulty are not merely matters of expediency but are fundamental principles, which by their nature must be permanent.

Then, of course, we shouldn't altogether overlook the present climate of opinion and the resurgence of interest in Christendom at large in these matters pertaining to the church. Nowadays, over in Ireland, we have far more opportunity for witness to the Lord and to the gospel, in the stricter sense of that term, among Roman Catholics than perhaps has been possible for centuries. I find myself 'monastery crawling' these days, and it is very interesting to hear it at all levels—with the priests, nuns, monks and canons in the Roman Catholic Church—this widespread resurgence of interest in what the New Testament has to say about the church. A year ago, I was sitting in an Assumption convent talking to the nun who is their theologian, quite a high powered theologian—if it hadn't been for illness, she would have been out in the Far East lecturing their bishops and what not—and she was telling me how dreadfully tired they were because they were working some seven hours a day. When I asked the reason, she said, 'We're changing the rules of our order. These rules grew up in the Middle Ages. People thought then that these disciplines were good for holy life. But it has come to be that people think that holiness is just by keeping the rules, and of course, that's all nonsense. Holiness is not keeping rules. It's being led by the Holy Spirit.'

And here she was expounding to me as though I were some pagan who had never heard these things! She said, 'You know, we must get back to the New Testament. We can't do exactly like they did in the New Testament for things have changed, but we must get back to the principle of the New Testament, to the simplicity of the New Testament. The New Testament likens the church to a body with all the members functioning. We try to do that. We hold retreats, and we aim to have a nun and a monk and a layman all taking part, because there's not just one man doing it. It's all the members of the body. We've got to get back to this, being led by the Holy Spirit and all the members of the body functioning.'

I asked if that will lead to a diminution of the power of the priest. 'I'm afraid it will,' she said, 'but we can't help that.' You may have heard of a book by Cardinal Suenens, *Co-responsibility in the Church*, in which he argues that in this modern climate, where authority is challenged at every level, we must have another look at the institutions that have grown up in Christendom and see what things are permanent, how far it does reflect the basic principles of the New Testament that Christ designed for his church, and how much has been added by way of expediency down the ages that we must now have the courage to throw out, if need be. If there is this resurgence of interest in the New Testament among such an extreme right-wing body as the Roman Catholic Church, perhaps we evangelicals, if we are that, oughtn't to lag behind them in this interest.

## **The church's responsibility for discipline**

The passage we have just read introduces us to the question of church discipline—first of all at the level of the individual church at Corinth, and then we may take leave to consider it in a wider context. To come back to my general thesis once more, you will observe that what Paul says about church discipline isn't just a matter of expediency of the moment. It does concern the matter of people's salvation. Did you notice what were the overriding concerns as he talked about the disciplining of this unfortunate man who had fallen? He said that these things must be done to deliver this man to Satan, 'for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord' (v. 5). And anything that affects our salvation cannot be left merely as a matter of expediency. It is a false dichotomy to think that salvation is the evangelical side of our activity, in a little separate compartment, and that now we can go our own way, as if church principles and practice are merely a matter of smooth organizational running. That is not so. The way we run our churches and what we do is an integral part of people's salvation.

A solemn matter such as this—the disciplining of a man that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord—is something of the utmost importance and, if nothing else, obliges us to look at our church practices lest they conflict with the interests of people's salvation. Now the excommunication of this man at Corinth with a view to his salvation (and his restoration to the church, according to my reading of 2 Corinthians) raises a very basic matter. You hear Paul speak of this when he says that it is their responsibility to judge those within the church. This is a matter of no small significance. He is not just acting as a one-man band. When it comes to disciplining this man, he wants the whole church at Corinth to do it. 'I shall be there, at least in spirit, and the power of the Lord Jesus will be there, but the function is not an apostolic function. You do it.' This group of Christians at Corinth have the direct responsibility for government in their church.

But he says now, 'It's your job to judge those who are inside the church as distinct from those who are outside.' So in those days, there was an 'inside' the church and an 'outside' the church, which was straightforward and simple when the church was all young and fresh, and a very small minority group in the middle of a city which was for the rest quite pagan. But now if you think about this vexed matter of church government, dealing with the offenders and so forth, you will remember that as the centuries passed by, great changes came over Christendom. Notably, that crisis when old Constantine gave up his paganism (or did he?) and became a Christian. And there ceased to be an inside and outside when it came to matters of church government. The church with its spiritual power joined with the civil power, and the church and the magistrate became merely two aspects of the same thing. I needn't tell you who are better historians than I am, the tremendous implications of this for subsequent centuries both politically and ecclesiastically. The concept now in a given community was that, because the civil magistrates were 'Christian', the whole community was 'Christian'; and that government in the church was not merely a spiritual matter but a matter that concerned the civil magistrate.

Everyone had got to be in the church. If not, he was being disloyal to the civil power. People like Augustine quoted the words of our Lord in the parable of the Great Banquet: if sinners wouldn't be converted by gentle means, then they had to be brought into the church

by other means. 'Compel them to come in', said Augustine, quoting our Lord's words to the servants who were told to go out into the highways and the byways and compel the people to come into the great banquet (see Luke 14:12-24). The church authorities argued that if people were so empirically wicked that they wouldn't get converted anyway and come into the church, then they must be compelled to come into the church. Having been compelled to come into the church they would, it was hoped, gradually see sense and grow up into salvation somehow; but into the church they must come. They must have their infants baptized. They must be Christians. All that sorry history of persecution in the Middle Ages stemmed largely from this.

And when the Reformers came along, you remember the disagreements that those dear and godly men had among themselves as to whether they should perpetuate this system or not. Luther, like others of the Reformers, struggling against the mass might of Rome encased in the armour of her civil power, felt that the only possible way to survive was likewise to embrace the same principle and have the church and state one, and the gospel supported by the civil power. So it was that the Reformers fell likewise to persecuting people who took a different view. To be an Anabaptist when Luther was in power was a terrible crime. They'd as likely bind you and cast you into the bottom of the lake—give you a taste of your baptism all over again, so to speak—because it was held that the whole of Christianity would crumble and God's interest would be broken up and shattered if people were allowed their individual conscience and the magistrate was not given power to coerce people into conforming to the doctrines of the church.

I don't suppose that we, in this modern age, would like ourselves as Christians to be associated with all the terrible bondage and degradation to human dignity that resulted from that view of the church. Discrimination on the basis of faith, enforced by the civil magistrate, is to say the least an exceedingly important question. Your answer to the question whether it should or should not be done, will in some part turn on whether you think the church is nothing different from Judaism, and is meant to proceed on the same principles as Judaism. You'll remember what happened in Old Testament days. If I may use the term 'church'—it's a little bit inappropriate but if I may use the term—church and state were one, and were meant to be one. Deuteronomy says that the Israelites, living in city A over here, if they heard that in city B there was a heretic who was teaching the people idolatry and drawing the people away after false gods, they were to rise up as one man and they were to go to that city and deal with him in no uncertain manner. The kings and the sovereigns were responsible for setting the spiritual tone. You'll see instances of this in the great revivals that happened in Israel, where it was the king leading the people and binding themselves into a covenant with God that they were to be the Lord's people. And if Jezebel, that unfortunate soul, introduced prophets of Baal into the land, you slaughtered them at the edge of the sword if you were an Elijah.

Is the church meant to do that? Is the church on the same footing as Israel? Are you to think that since Constantine, if not before, everybody in a country is 'Christian', and church and state are one? The question is raised very early on in the Acts of the Apostles. In chapter 12, there's a story of Herod's antics. Herod didn't like the Christians, so it says that about that time Herod, the king, laid hands on some who belonged to the church, and he killed James,

the brother of John, with the sword (see Acts 12:1–2). That was bad enough, for Herod was a straight old pagan. But now the next verses are pathetic, in my estimation.

And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. (vv. 3–4)

‘It pleased the Jews.’ Here was Judaism, finding itself unable to cope with this powerful new movement of Christians with their gospel that was beginning to triumph. Despairing of other methods, they were glad at heart when old pagan Herod used his civil power to begin to try and stop the Christians. There’s a little bit of pathos, isn’t there, in the remark by the historian that Herod put Peter in prison at the time of Unleavened Bread and he was about to bring him out after Passover. Do you remember what Passover was all about? The insistent cry of God to Pharaoh through Moses was, ‘Let my people go, that they may worship me.’

‘No,’ said Pharaoh, ‘let them stay here and worship.’

‘No,’ said God through Moses, ‘I want my people to be utterly free to worship God as their conscience directs.’

And Israel owed its beginning and its whole setup to God’s intervention to secure their freedom from the civil power of pagan magistrates, to worship God according to their own conscience. Within Israel, as the people of God, they had the right to judge according to the methods that God had laid down for them in those days. They had the right to judge those who were in Israel. But to import a pagan, and such a one as Herod, to try and squash and make these Christians conform, was a sad forgetting of their own basic principle of Passover.

Now, you who think otherwise must forgive me when I say this. Believe me, I say it without any rancour or party spirit. But if you were to talk like this to my Roman Catholic friends, they would want to maintain that Constantine and the whole setup were all Christians, and it was only Christian magistrates using the sword. Were they Christians? Has there ever been such a thing as a Christian country? Well, of course, according to the Roman Catholic view, yes, because all the parents were forced to have all the babies baptized and once the baby was baptized, it was a Christian. Well, if you can make people Christians that way, you can have a whole country of Christians fairly quickly. But it is no small issue, for if there is no such thing as the regeneration of infants through baptism, then what you are doing by making people join the church in that method is simply importing unregenerate people into the church. This is a very, very big matter. And I ask you to notice that it comes back once more to our whole concept of the gospel. This isn’t some little matter about which we are free to make up our own minds. It comes right down, fundamentally, to what it means to be a Christian—whether the church is a group of regenerate people or whether it was meant to be a mixture all the way along.

Let me come, therefore, just to complete this part of my remarks, to observe that even in the Roman Catholic church, some of my friends therein tell me, there is developing quite a sizable conscience on these matters. I spent two days just the other month lecturing students

in a White Fathers<sup>2</sup> college. It was good stuff. I had my model of the tabernacle there, and you had to be careful whose corns you might tread on. If you start talking about the great question of sacrifice and the priests in Israel who stood daily offering the same sacrifice; and then you read Hebrews, where our great priest offered one sacrifice for sin, and forever sat down; well, you have to be very tactful while not compromising the truth. Sitting with the principal at breakfast the next morning, we fell to discussing Charles Davis, the Catholic theologian who had resigned from the church in 1966 on the basis of 'an intellectual objection to the Papacy'. And he said, 'You know, the reason Charles Davis had to get out of the church was because he was so conservative. He interpreted it all so literally that it became a tremendous prison house to him, and the only way he could cope with that was to get out. If only he'd been a bit more liberal he wouldn't have found it such a prison house, and he could have stayed in. All this business about the Pope and the infallibility of the Pope was an old feudal idea. The church developed these structures in those feudal days when men's idea of society was feudal with the overlord telling the serfs what to do. We've got to modify that now, and we hope that in the next twenty or so years things will change.' I couldn't help thinking perhaps he's a bit optimistic. But it did seem to me there was some truth in it, that this sort of superstructure of church government as you find in its fullest expression in Roman Catholicism, was very much a product of that kind of feudal thinking. It is not like anything you will find anywhere in the New Testament.

*Can wheat and weeds co-exist?*

One final word before we proceed to more detailed stuff. Here in this chapter the Corinthians are solemnly charged before God and the Lord Jesus, to discipline this man and put him out of the church. Now, that gives rise to a matter that came up in an earlier session. Some people have held that it wasn't ours, and it isn't ours, to exercise such discipline: that any such attempt to discipline is the height of priggishness, self-conceit and Pharisaism. They argue that our Lord never intended the church to be just a body of Christian people—he himself said it was going to be like a field full of wheat and weeds.

Really? Is the church really meant to be a field of wheat plus weeds? No, that cannot be, otherwise there is an outright contradiction between that passage in Matthew 13 and this present passage. In Matthew 13 certainly, as the parable goes, the servants came and said, 'Do you want us to go and gather the weeds?' And the Lord's reply was, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root out the wheat along with them' (see Matt 13:28–29). But there, of course, the servants being talked to were not elders in the church. They were angels. And the matter at hand was not a question of excommunication from the church, but the question of the final judgment. The weeds that did get eventually rooted out were gathered up into bundles and put into the lake of fire. That is none of our responsibility, to root people out and put them in the lake of fire. But it is altogether a different situation here. This man being put out is regarded as a believer: at least, he's called a brother. The whole object of the exercise for this man who has so grievously fallen is that he may be so disciplined that, being brought to repentance and restored, his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. I would submit to you

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<sup>2</sup> A Roman Catholic missionary society sending missionaries to Africa.

that there is no contradiction between this chapter and Matthew 13: they are talking about two completely different things.

### **Church government—who is responsible?**

Now the question of church government and discipline raises the more detailed matter of the offices of the church. I would like to turn now firstly to the broad question of government in the church and then the more restricted matter of government of the local church. Paul says in this chapter 5, that the Corinthians are to do the judging. He pictures the whole church being gathered together, himself there in spirit, and the power of the Lord Jesus there, and that church acting. It's their job. As far as I'm aware, you will never read anywhere in the New Testament of one church being asked to interfere in the affairs of another church.

Consider what this means in terms of individual freedom and responsibility. You may think I'm narrow minded with axes to grind, but of course what is at stake in this matter is spiritual freedom. Let me recur to this first of all in the context of the spread of the gospel. What was our Lord's intention for the spread of the gospel? How was it to be controlled? There came the critical moment when it was the Lord's will that the gospel should go out to the Gentiles, and Luke the historian spends a long time talking about it. Now there were in the church, as the sequel showed, very strong feelings about the matter—you shouldn't go and eat with Gentiles. Was it the case that Peter got an urge to go, so they called all the apostles together and they said, 'Brethren, may we go?' No. Peter got hungry one lunch time and went up on the house top, where he had a vision. The Lord said, 'Go,' and mercifully, without consulting James, he went. For had he consulted James, he mightn't have been there yet!

### **Central control and local autonomy**

I hold it as exceedingly important for the spread of the gospel and the freedom of the gospel. There was the living Christ directing operations immediately with Peter, and off Peter goes. He doesn't despise his brethren at Jerusalem who were the other apostles. When he came back, he was called to explain and, all honour to Peter, he went and gave an account of himself to his brethren. There wasn't any horrid spirit of isolation. But there was this tremendous principle of Christ's immediacy of control and direction for the spread of the gospel.

If you take the next big issue, the book of Acts deals with it in the same context. People got scattered from Jerusalem because of the persecution that arose about Stephen. Off they went, and at first they spoke the gospel to a number of Jews. It sounds incredible in our ears that anybody could ever think that the gospel was only just for Jews, but the astounding difference came one day when somebody got the idea of preaching it to Gentiles as well. It was absolutely revolutionary—imagine preaching the gospel to a Gentile! So they preached the gospel to Gentiles, and a lot of Gentiles got saved; and they began to meet together in Antioch and a church was formed. The apostles at Jerusalem had nothing to do with it. These records in the book of Acts are exceedingly important because this is a responsible history. This was a critical juncture in church history. Now you had a church outside Judaea, in Antioch, that had not been formed by the apostles in Jerusalem and had this remarkable feature that it was a church

now composed of Jew and Gentile, a condition that didn't exist in Jerusalem. What would Jerusalem do?

It was a vast new development in the church. On this whole area of study of church history, I would commend to you F. J. A. Hort's very fair study of the New Testament evidence<sup>3</sup>. He points out in this very particular, that they didn't send down one of the apostles, the big guns, demanding that they maintain loyalty to the apostles or something like that. They sent down Barnabas, who was 'a good man, full of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 11:24), and when he saw the grace of God, he was glad. 'The grace of God': God is the operative word; God had done it. They recognized this thing in Antioch as a spontaneous work of God and, through Barnabas, they had the grace and wisdom to say, 'Now, brethren, the main thing you must do is . . .' what? Remain faithful to us at Jerusalem? Accept our jurisdiction? No, they said, 'remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose' (v. 23). In their wisdom, they were confident that if those men remained faithful to the Lord, as they in Jerusalem were attempting to remain faithful to the Lord, the result would be the right kind of unity of spirit, preserving that freedom which is so essential for the spontaneous progress of the gospel.

#### *Personal autonomy*

You'll forgive me if I make this point very bluntly. You fellows and girls are just starting out in life, and you want to serve the Lord. Think twice before you accept a vast system of government that has no authority in the New Testament, and you surrender any of your freedom. These great bits of machinery that men have invented haven't always been helpful towards the spontaneous spread of the gospel. The Lord wants to have direct control over you. I am not brought here to put Roseford Hall's viewpoint. Nor am I giving you the viewpoint of the church of which I am a member. Nor am I asking you to join any group of churches. What I'm saying is that for the spread of the gospel's sake, you should preserve your freedom of direct responsibility to the Lord Jesus.

### **The Council of Jerusalem**

Here you'll say, 'But what about the Council of Jerusalem?' Again read F. J. Hort and his very persuasive passages pointing out what was really involved in that Council of Jerusalem (see Acts 15), and the grace and tact with which the people of that church wrote their letter, when they sent it around—relying, as Hort puts it, on moral authority not official authority. I commend it to you: he puts it better than I put it.

He also calls our attention to the famous passage in Galatians 2.

And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we

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<sup>3</sup> *The Christian Ecclesia* (1897).



should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. (vv. 6–10)

Now those are exceedingly strong words, particularly that phrase, ‘what they were makes no difference to me.’ He’s talking of apostles! What do you conceive to have been the relations between the twelve apostles? Was Peter in charge with the final word? No, Paul is very careful to explain here in Galatians that when he went up to Jerusalem, he didn’t go up there because he was summoned, as if in a sort of a heresy trial held at headquarters. No. He went up by revelation, because God told him this would be a good thing to do. And when he went up, he said, ‘It made no difference to me who they were.’ He makes it very clear that had those good men in Jerusalem differed from him over this matter of the gospel and whether people ought to be circumcised or not circumcised, he wouldn’t have taken any notice of them. Indeed there could have sat there an angel from heaven, but if he’d said anything else, Paul would not have listened to him. That’s strong language, isn’t it? Paul will fight for his own independence as an apostle.

He has more sense than to say, ‘I don’t care what they believe.’ When people came down to Antioch and said that the apostles in Jerusalem taught a different gospel from Paul and Barnabas, Paul went up to Jerusalem, not to be told what he could preach and what he was not to preach, but to get a public statement from all the apostles and elders of Jerusalem that they in Jerusalem taught exactly the same as Paul taught elsewhere. It would have been a tragic thing if the idea had been allowed to become fixed — that Paul and Peter taught different things. Paul and Peter taught exactly the same.

But not to be tiresome, I point out to you what this lecture on church history in Galatians is doing and what it’s all about. The matter of the relations between the apostles isn’t really the issue. This whole chapter of church history is here in this Epistle to the Galatians because Paul is fighting for the very fundamentals of the gospel. It’s not an irrelevancy to the gospel. And if you want to keep clear the glorious sovereign freedom of the gospel and the truth of the gospel, one of these days you’ll have to fight tooth and nail too for Paul’s independence.

Let me tell you a story. There was a man in Belfast who was much attracted to becoming a monk in the higher regions of the Catholic Church. His friends who worked in the same office thought it would be a good thing if he came and had a little chat with me. So he came one afternoon, and to set the ball rolling, I said, ‘Well, now tell me, what would you say that you’re resting on for salvation?’

‘On my baptism,’ he said, ‘for I don’t agree with you evangelicals at all, preaching to people that they’ve got to have this personal, emotional experience, this subjective thing. I put my faith in the objective thing of my baptism.’

As we got chatting, he commented that there really oughtn’t to be all these differences between Christians.

‘No,’ I said, ‘but I would find it very difficult to be a Roman Catholic, for the church that you seem to be so enamoured with curses me.’

‘Oh, no,’ he said.

‘Yes, it does. It says that if you are sure of salvation that is terrible pride and worthy to be accursed.’

'But you shouldn't be sure, anyway. Nothing that defiles can enter into heaven, and we're all so defiled, aren't we? None of us could be sure. That's why perhaps after death we must still go through long ages of cleansing. We shall not get into heaven with anything defiled in us.'

'So what's a person to do?' I asked.

'Well,' he said, 'you have to strive.'

I said, 'I begin to get the impression that after all, you're not trusting your baptism but it much depends on your striving, doesn't it?'

That shows the problem caused by infant baptism. When you can talk to people like this they will tell you they're justified by faith, but what they're talking about is faith in baptismal regeneration. Thereafter, of course, it depends on their efforts to keep them right, and they hope one day to get into heaven.

'Oh,' he said, 'it does depend of course on our behaviour.'

So we read Romans 4: 'To the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness' (v. 5).

He said, 'I didn't know that was there, but that is the fundamental mistake with you Protestants, thinking that just anybody can interpret the Bible. It was the church that gave us the Bible and the church must be allowed to interpret it. There are many other theologians that will interpret that differently.'

I said, 'That is a serious thing if I can't interpret this. Tell me, suppose I had been in Arabia when Paul was in Arabia. And I got concerned about my soul and I'd gone off to Paul and asked him how a man can be right with God; and Paul had told me, by word of mouth, what here he's written down in Romans 4. Should I have been able to listen to him and say that I'm going to trust Christ, like he said? Or would I have had to go up to Jerusalem and ask the church whether Paul was right and what Paul meant?'

He said, 'You'd have had to go up to Jerusalem and ask the church.'

'No I wouldn't,' I said, 'because Paul says that he didn't get his gospel from the church.'

'He did. The church gave us the Bible. The church gave us the gospel.'

'It says in Galatians 1:1, "Paul, an apostle—not from men".'

'But it came through men: through those who were apostles before Paul was.'

'No it didn't, because he says, "Not from men nor through man".'

When he persisted in saying that it was the church that gave us the gospel, I had to read him at length from chapter 2.

'Those who were at Jerusalem, whatever they were, they added nothing to me' (see v. 6).

'They did.'

'They didn't. Here is Paul telling us they didn't.'

So I asked if he knew why all this business about church history is here in Galatians.

He didn't know.

I explained from the context that it is concerned with the whole matter we began talking about—how a person can be right with God. Is it by faith? Is it by works? And Paul is insisting that you can come to Paul direct, you don't have to go through the church. You can come to Paul direct, believe what he says and be saved. But you will observe that this matter of the relation of the apostles to the whole question of the government of the church is not just an

arbitrary matter where we can do what we think is expedient: it comes right down to the vitals of the gospel. 'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery' (Gal 5:1).

## **Government in the local church**

We can see then that the apostles were in that sense independent; and the churches they founded were in that same sense independent. If you hold the view that Jerusalem was meant to be the headquarters in some things, you will be hard put to prove which city it was that God appointed to be the headquarters after Jerusalem was destroyed! And you will have a very big, practical problem in asking obedience to something that is not in Scripture! How then did that go wrong in the individual churches? First of all, let's come to the matter of what you may be pleased to call the church's officers. First, the 'priest'.

### **'Priests'**

What are priests? All the churches, by force of Scripture, admit that in the New Testament all believers are priests. To mention just a couple of examples:

Being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices. (1 Pet 2:5)

And you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God. (Rev 5:10)

All believers are priests, in the sense of sacrificing priests: we have spiritual sacrifices to offer and material sacrifices to offer,

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. (Heb 13:16)

### *Priests versus laity*

But as you know, in Christendom the idea of a priest grew up in another sense—priest as contrasted with the people who are not priests—priests as distinct from laity. It grew up and is attached to this present day to an erroneous idea of the gospel: that the priest as distinct from the laity is a real sacrificing priest who at the altar offers a literal sacrifice—the body of Christ is offered to God. Rome would have told you that they have an actual sacrifice to offer on that altar. They are really priests, in the sense of the Greek word *hiereus*. I needn't stress that it's a blasphemy, but it holds millions enchained.

### *Priests in another sense*

Those who in Protestant circles use the term 'priest', particularly in evangelical circles, will point out to you that 'priest' in this sense is not the word in the New Testament at all. If they use the word 'priest' of a minister of a church, for instance, they will say, 'No, it's not the word going back to the Greek *hiereus* at all, but a corruption of the Greek word *presbuteros*. Well, linguistically, I suppose that is so. The Greek term *presbuteros* in the New Testament, literally meaning an elder, was taken over into Anglo-Saxon and by use, being Anglicized, eventually

came down to the pronunciation ‘priest’ —just as the word ‘bishop’ in many modern European languages is a corrupted form of the Greek word *episkopos* (overseer).

If what you mean by ‘priest’ is, in fact, a New Testament elder or overseer, then we come down to the plain fact of holy Scripture that in the churches of the New Testament there were many ‘priests’ —many elders. We read in Acts 20:17, for instance, that from Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus and called to him ‘the elders [*presbuteros*] of the church’. Where reference is made to them in the New Testament, you will constantly find that each church had a group of elders, not just one man. They are also called ‘overseers’, as we see from the same passage where Paul says to the elders, ‘Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, [‘bishops’ in RV] to care for the church of God’ (v. 28).

Along with them, there were other officers. Paul writes to the church at Philippi ‘with the overseers and deacons’ (Phil 1:1); and in 1 Timothy 3 he lists the features such men should have if they are to serve the local church, as their name (*diakonos*—servant) implies. They are servants, but holding an official, public position in the church. Likewise, there appear to be many of them in each church.

### *No hierarchy*

The hierarchical practice of diocesan bishop is a later development. You will not find it in the New Testament. People think that it is foreshadowed in the status of Titus and Timothy. You may remember that Paul writing to Titus said, ‘I’ve left you in Crete that you should appoint elders in the churches’ (see 1:5). And Timothy was in Ephesus to regulate matters, and he’s told what to do with the elders and other issues. Some say, ‘Here we have it: Paul the apostle, Titus and Timothy embryonic diocesan bishops, in control of local elders.’ I would want to maintain that they are not embryonic bishops at all: they are simply part of Paul’s evangelical team, doing his job for him in his absence.

### **Maintaining the church’s servants**

Finally I want to deal with the maintenance of the government and ministry of the church. For that, I’ll ask you to look at 1 Corinthians 9. (You will allow me, in my special status, to pass by the sections in 1 Corinthians that deal with marriage!) So in chapter 9 Paul says,

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. This is my defence to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.’ (vv. 1–9)

If you read that passage, you will find that Paul is here talking about the maintenance of the servants of the church. Now, if you take not merely this chapter but the whole of the New

Testament, you will find what appears to be a contradiction, at least a talking in two directions. In this passage, Paul fights to the last inch for the right of an apostle to be maintained by the church, he and his wife, and quotes Old Testament principle, and lays it down as a matter of the lordship of Christ, for the Lord has ordained it. Similarly, in 1 Timothy 5 he says that the elders who rule well can be counted worthy of double honour, and he proceeds to quote the same Old Testament principle, and adds our Lord's own application of it.

You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain. (Deut 25:4)

The labourer deserves his wages. (Luke 10:7)

So here is Paul holding forth strongly as he writes to the churches that apostles and elders have a right to be maintained.

When you read other passages, you will at first sight find them to be speaking the exact opposite, apparently, and you'll be left to have to resolve the tension between these passages. The key to that tension, perhaps, you'll find here in chapter 9, where it is speaking of the *right* to be maintained. But for good reasons he didn't use it, and those reasons you will find set out in that address to the elders of Ephesus, with which remarks I now close. When Paul got the elders of Ephesus together, he counselled them about various aspects of their duty as elders or overseers in that church, and then he gave a tremendous appeal to them.

And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' (Acts 20:32-35)

Please notice he's talking to elders and overseers. There's a tension, yes, between these passages. Paul says that apostles, and elders sometimes if they rule well and have particular loads, have a right to be maintained. That's normally what he tells the believers in the church. But here you get Paul speaking to the elders themselves, and he says, 'Gentlemen, do you know the happier way, the more blessed way? It's to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, "It's more blessed to give than to receive." Work with your own hands, and remember it's a part of your duty as an elder to do like I did. Work with your own hands so that you can give to the poor.'

There is no sense of some great authoritative figure lording it over other people, telling them what to do spiritually, and then they have to maintain him. It's part of your ministry as an elder to give to the poor: if it so be, to work to get it so that you can give it. And what is more, he says 'we must'. Now, somewhere along the line, different people are going to resolve that tension in different ways, obviously. It is characteristic of the New Testament that in things like this it doesn't come down finally and say, 'do this' or 'do that'. These matters are left to our own spiritual judgment. But of course this is an exceedingly important matter. A question of finance and maintenance as it concerns the spread of the gospel and the running

of the churches is an exceedingly important thing, and we do need to face the issue clearly, particularly at the beginning of our lives. What are we going to do? If Paul were here this morning as an apostle talking to potential elders, he would tell you, 'Gentlemen, you really ought to do as I do—work; and remember the words of the Lord Jesus: that it is more blessed to give than to receive.'

## The Lord's Table, the Lord's Supper, and Spiritual Gifts

### *1 Corinthians 10–14*

In this session, I would like to talk of three things—the question of the Lord's table, the question of the Lord's Supper, and the question of the spiritual gifts. The first of these is found in 1 Corinthians 10.

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. 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. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (vv. 14–21)

### **The Lord's table**

The expression *the Lord's table* is one which goes back to the Old Testament. You'll find it in the prophecy of Malachi for instance (1:7, 12), where the priests by their lax conduct were guilty of saying that the Lord's table was contemptible. In that context, if you read it, you will find that the phrase 'the Lord's table' is referring to Israel's offerings upon the altar, but it is not called *altar*. It is rather called *table* because when we think of the table of the Lord, we are thinking of the provision that God has made for us, and of our fellowship with him and his with us. That fellowship, of course, is based upon the sacrifice of Christ. When we think of the sacrifice of Christ in these terms we are thinking of all those many spiritual benefits that are provided for us—a fellowship with God through our Lord's sacrifice. The main lesson to be learned, it seems to me, from this particular paragraph, is that there is no partaking of the benefit without involvement.

What that obscure phrase means, I'll attempt to say in a moment. The context is the question of the church's relation with the temple of idols—a very practical and immediate problem for these Corinthian Christians in the midst of their pagan city. Obviously, some of these Corinthians were taking a view that it was possible to have some extent of mixture. Elsewhere, Paul will argue that the thing offered to an idol is neither here nor there, in some

sense. But whether you should or should not eat things offered to idols is a problem in which there are many different levels, and different considerations will apply at different levels. Here Paul is concerned to point to a basic principle—that there is no partaking of benefit without involvement. He argues this first from the table of the Lord, and uses the imagery and the symbolism of the Lord's Supper to do so. In particular, notice verse 17 where he says that we who are many are one body for we all partake of the one bread. It seems to me that what he is saying is this. Suppose at the Lord's Supper, the loaf being used was of a size that, when every individual member had taken his or her part, the loaf had been consumed. Now, please tell me, where is the loaf? The people are the loaf: they are the one loaf, for they have partaken of that one loaf. Although for the moment you are talking about a physical bit of bread, and of course there's no magical power to it, it will serve you as a very good illustration of what Paul is trying to get across.

When it comes to the spiritual realities that are provided for us through the sacrifice of Christ—the lovely spiritual realities of forgiveness of sins and peace with God and fellowship with God's people—there is no partaking of the benefits without becoming involved. You don't have to come to any church to do it, but by reason of the fact that you have received Christ as saviour, you receive from him eternal life, forgiveness, redemption and sanctification—those spiritual benefits provided by his sacrifice. By that very partaking, you've been constituted one with all those who likewise have partaken of that table. But there is no partaking of the benefits of Christianity without becoming involved.

The notion that I can be a Christian but I needn't bother to be in a church is clean contrary to this principle that we are here discussing. The partaking of the table of the benefits of Christ's sacrifice constitutes a oneness with all who so do it. And God intended that to be exploited in all its implications. But you will observe that the point is being made in the context of this practical problem of what relation Christianity has to these pagan religions. The answer is patent: it can have none. The things that these Gentiles sacrificed to idols were, in fact, sacrificed to demons. You cannot go and partake of the table of demons without being spiritually involved. Notice the strength of the phrase: it doesn't mean physically you cannot, but it's a moral impossibility which, if we attempt, we shall find God's hand heavy on us. You cannot partake of the Lord's table and the table of demons, for in so doing, you will provoke the Lord to jealousy.

We must watch ourselves, because Christianity has become infiltrated in various ways with precisely this kind of thing. Free Masonry is one sad example. Christendom is riddled from one end to the other with Free Masonry. As you may know, in their sessions they worship an unholy amalgam of all those old, pagan, oriental religions plus a little Christianity and sun worship hooked on. It's a form of religion in which you can have Jew and Christian together, though the one denies the deity of Christ—apparently it makes no difference. And when that letter to Thyatira mentions Jezebel (see Rev 2:20), the Old Testament critics have been helpful here in pointing out to us that very often, when the Bible castigates people for the worship of Baal, what they were actually doing was worshiping Jehovah under the form of Baal, or rather Baal under the form of Jehovah. You remember the tremendous fuss on Mount Carmel, because of the fact that God is a jealous God. Remember the stern warning



that we read in our first session, that you may not allow conduct that detracts from the majesty and unique glory of our risen Lord, his Sonship, his divinity.

Therefore, this principle is very important, for some people are inclined to argue that you can partake of the social benefits of Free Masonry, or of its economic and business advantage, without partaking of the rest. No, you can't, my brother, for there is no partaking of the benefits without spiritual involvement. That's how God reads it. It cuts both ways, both with Christianity and with pagan religion. Taking the benefits is, in God's sight, to be spiritually involved. I need say no more: I have made a general thesis as heretofore, that underlying the particular things which Paul is trying to correct, there lurks once more a basic spiritual principle.

### **The Lord's Supper**

Let's move on now to consideration of the Lord's Supper, which is a more specific matter. The Lord's *table* perhaps describes all those benefits that have come to us through the sacrifice of Christ. At that table I may sit at any hour of the day or night if I wish. In contrast, the Lord's *Supper* is a particular celebration that we are here directed to have when the church comes together, rather than at home. We have to call to mind our Lord's death. Not, please, to make another sacrifice, a token sacrifice all over again, but a remembrance of what Christ has done. Let us read the passage and notice again a basic Christian principle.

But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

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. 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. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another — if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home — so that when you come together it will not be for judgement. About the other things I will give directions when I come. (11:17–34)

The mere reading of that paragraph, it seems to me, ought to be enough to show us that in this particular ordinance in the church, we have something that is once more linked inseparably with our salvation—in the sense of our ongoing, day to day, practical salvation. Notice also the insistence with which Paul under inspiration repeats this phrase ‘the Lord’, ‘the Lord’s’. It is exceedingly relevant to the topic at hand—it is the *Lord’s* Supper. It is surely impossible to say that it doesn’t matter whether we observe the Lord’s Supper or not. I want to say this in all kindness of heart, because surely one can see the considerations that have led some sections of Christians to abandon the celebration of the Lord’s Supper or push it into the background. They have observed how easily ordinances turn to ritual, devoid of any spiritual profit. They have observed how ordinances have a way of becoming superstitions, and in some parts of the world where people have got the impression that the bread and the wine impart some magic or something, you’d almost wish you could beg them to stop the whole thing in order to get it clear that there is no magic in it at all. I feel like that sometimes with my own Catholic friend.

### **Personal examination**

But then to go to the other extreme and say that the Lord’s Supper is an optional extra and that the main thing is to get on and work for the Lord, that is quite mistaken. The Lord’s Supper is a celebration which is laid upon us as a command. Among other things, it enforces on me the regular necessity of examining my heart before God. I am commanded to come. I am commanded that as I come, I am to examine myself and judge myself. We are called not merely to *judge* ourselves—that is, when we have done wrong and repent of it: we are required to do that. We are required to *examine* ourselves; that is, I mustn’t just merrily go along under the supposition that I’m alright. The fact is that in many things I offend. I’ve got wrong attitudes that I am not aware of. My friends may be aware of them, though too kind or too gentle or too Christian to tell me. I can’t go along as though my heart is the most wonderful, pure heart that ever was. The fact is that ‘[my] heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick’ (Jer 17:9), and I’m called upon to have a regular examination of my heart. Not a morbid introspection, for if there’s one thing the Lord’s Supper will do, it will put right any tendency to morbid introspection in God’s wisdom.

But first of all, I am called upon to examine myself. Constantly to come to the Lord and say, ‘Now, Lord, show me if there be any wicked way in me.’ For if I come to the Lord’s Supper carelessly, without so doing, what I am doing, so to speak, is compounding with the very sin that murdered Christ. To take that symbol of his sacrifice and remember that it was my sin that murdered him, and at the same time to be allowing that sin to go on merrily unjudged, that is to be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. You say, ‘Could a Christian do that?’ Well, perhaps it is not by chance that Paul is moved to give, here, the only reference to the betrayal in the whole of the Epistles. When we come to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we are reminded that he instituted it on the night in which he was betrayed. You observe the emphasis. It is the Lord’s death we celebrate. It is the Lord’s body. Not just the body of Jesus. It wasn’t just Jesus who died. It was the Lord who died. How on earth did the Lord come to die? He was betrayed by somebody who professed his lordship but didn’t mean it. That night he was betrayed with a kiss, which was a false profession. We’re not saying that any true

Christian is a Judas, but we must be very careful lest we cry, 'Lord, Lord,' and yet do not do the things that he said.

There are some solemn words in the Sermon on the Mount. The Lord spoke of some who would come in that day saying, 'Lord, Lord open to us', and claiming that they had cast out demons in his name; to which he replied, 'I never knew you' (see Matt 7:21–23). Being allowed to cast out a demon in the name of the Lord Jesus doesn't necessarily imply that you are a genuine believer. As you get into his kingdom, your focus should be on doing the will of his Father. So then we come and we're told to come to a celebration that reminds us, by its very institution, of this very real danger—professing the lordship of Christ, yet in behaviour denying it. Do you not see how necessary this is to keep me on the rails? I could go off, saying that I'm working for the Lord, but before I'm aware, it's my own self I'm pleasing. I'm going my own way: I'm doing it my own way. The Lord's Supper asks me to come back and to examine my heart, whether in all of life I am genuinely seeking to submit to his lordship.

### **The new covenant**

Then, of course, there is another side to this matter. I said that observing the Lord's Supper is an integral part in our day to day salvation. Consider the cup that is given into our hands on this occasion. It is said to be 'the new covenant in his blood'. Not *a* new covenant: *the* new covenant. That is to say, it's the new covenant that Jeremiah spoke of (see Jer 31:31–34). It is the new covenant as distinct from the old covenant, Moses's law. The terms of this new covenant are cited for us in the Epistle to the Hebrews:

This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds . . . I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more. (10:16–17)

When, therefore, we take the cup of the Lord's covenant at the Lord's Supper, we are reminded of the Lord's covenanting himself to us. That is a delightful thing. The very Supper that reminds us of the fickleness of the human heart—the night on which he was betrayed—reminds us of his absolute constancy. He has not only blessed us and promised to bless us, but he has covenanted to bless us. Oh, his glorious faith in us.

And bless us in what particular? Well, please notice there are three clauses that are here cited in Hebrews, not just one. It is not merely that we remember that his blood has brought us forgiveness, but even before that is mentioned, there is the positive promise of the gracious work of his Holy Spirit in our hearts. Writing the very laws of God upon our heart, so that we come naturally to love to do God's will. And writing them on our minds, so that we come naturally to think God's will. In other words, here is God's gracious programme of making me holy, in a practical sense. I am called upon to examine myself and, if it weren't for this other side of the affair, I might become very gloomy. Whenever I think I've overcome some particular weakness, lo and behold, there's another one coming through the backdoor. I could get terribly introspective and downcast, and if my faith in these matters gets so downcast and depressed, I've lost the power to live up to the new covenant anyway.

So alongside the duty to examine myself—when I shall discover a lot of ugly things—comes the Lord's gracious and continual reminder of his faithful covenant in which he guarantees that he will write his laws on my heart and mind. He will not be content until the story is finished and my heart and mind are conformed to the image of Christ. And in the ongoing struggle against sin and war against the flesh, there is nothing more practical than the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

### **Observing the Lord's Supper—when?**

But I am talking to the converted, am I not? Just in case I'm not, we are not told in Scripture how many times a week we've got to do it! There is the curious phenomenon—you may count it a coincidence and un-designed—but the adjective which is used for the *Lord's Supper* is a rarish word in the Greek New Testament. It is *kuriakos*, which means 'belonging to the Lord' and it occurs only twice. It occurs here and in Revelation 1:10, the *Lord's Day*. The same word is found in modern Greek *kuriaké* which is their word for Sunday: take it or leave it as you please! What we are commanded to do, is to do it. We cannot surely take the view that it doesn't matter.

### **The spiritual gifts**

Now, finally, for my part, I'm going to be quite virtuous and brief, which is unusual! Just a few words on the question of the spiritual gifts. This is the section of Corinthians, as you know, that goes from chapter 12 through 13 and 14. Inasmuch as I've already made allusions to this in earlier sessions, I beg leave at this juncture to say very little, only to get on to my old hobbyhorse once more. Whereas it is the fact that these chapters are in the context of Paul correcting certain abuses that had sprung up in Corinth, there shines through them, as through all these other matters in Corinthians, that certain basic principles are at stake that affect our salvation. They are not just minor matters of organization that are 'indifferent', as the theologians say.

Here, there is plainly pictured a plurality of gift and the analogy is used of the human body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you.' The foot cannot say, 'Just because I'm not an eye, I'm not necessary.' All are necessary and all must be given their appropriate occasion for use. Are all apostles? No, certainly not. Are all teachers? No, I shouldn't think so. We see the clear insistence on the variety of gift that was in the church. And of the prophets it is said, you may all prophesy. One by one, of course—there's not to be an uproar of five or six prophets all carrying on at once. There is to be dignity and order. If something is revealed to another sitting there, the first speaker should sit down to let the other proceed. And when they've finished, they've got to submit to the judgment of their brethren, and so forth and so on.

There is to be order, of course, but obviously here is a group of people with various gifts, with the Holy Spirit using this one or that one. Does it matter whether we do it that way or not? Well, of course it matters, because consider how this whole affair came to be, that there is a plurality of gifts here to be exercised. The operative verses are:

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. 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. (12:12–13)

This question of the Christian church being like a body with a plurality of gifts all working harmoniously together, isn't some whim of a more liberal democratic side of the church. This is not something that you are at liberty to alter. It comes about by this fundamental operation of God's salvation. By one Spirit you were baptized into one body. By that same Spirit you were all made to drink.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit, you may remember, is the thing *par excellence* that distinguishes Christ from all other preachers. John was the greatest of the prophets. In owning the vast difference between himself and the Lord Jesus, he fixed on this point. 'I baptize with water,'—so he would have done, if he got his hands on you—'but among you stands one you do not know . . . this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit' (John 1:26, 33). This is his glory and his uniqueness.

Let us notice, however, that two images are used: 'in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— . . . —and all were made to drink of one Spirit' (12:13). When Christ baptizes people with the Holy Spirit, he puts them into the Holy Spirit. The idea is not, pardon my saying, that the Holy Spirit comes down to land on top of you. Christ is putting you into the Holy Spirit as John would have put you in water. Then you were made to drink. When somebody drinks some water, the water goes into him. I am made to drink of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit comes into me. A believer is in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is in him or her. What a wonderful and glorious thing!

What has that got to do with being in the body? Well, what do you think it is that makes the Christian body? If I might use the analogy of my human body, have a look at my human body for a moment. What do you think keeps this finger on my body here? Somebody would say, 'All the bones and the muscles.' Not so. For if you were to kill me this afternoon (why you should, I can't think!) but if you did, and you were to lay me on the floor here and leave me for six months, when you came back you'd find my finger wouldn't be on the body, despite all the bones and the muscles. The thing that keeps my finger on my body is that right down to the tip of my finger flows that common life and, therefore, that finger is in the body. That is what Christ has done—to baptize his people in the Holy Spirit and put the Holy Spirit in them—and because they are indwelt with the Holy Spirit and he is the very atmosphere in which they live, they are constituted one body.

That embarrassed Peter one day, didn't it? He was ordered to take the gospel to the Gentiles. He had his doubts about it. They were finally overcome by the vision of the sheet let down from heaven, so he went. When he got back to Jerusalem, however, he faced some criticism, and Acts 11 has a delicious little story where Peter is defending himself before his brethren. 'You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them,' they said. Now hear Peter. 'Brethren, actually I couldn't help it. I was told to go. It wasn't my fault. All I did was to stand there and preach, and while I was preaching, the Holy Spirit fell on them: I didn't even lay my hands on them. And then I remembered the word of the Lord Jesus, how he said to us at the beginning that John baptized you with water but you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us, who was I that I could stand in God's way?' (see Acts 11:15–17).

We were filled with him; we are in him, baptized into him. He's the source and secret of all our life and its maintenance. You notice the emphasis, 'In one Spirit we were *all* baptized'. This is not something that's true of some believers and not others. A person who hasn't been baptized in the Holy Spirit is not in the body. How on earth would he get in? The body of Christ isn't an organization that you can decide to join. It is a living thing and all, whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, whatever you are, have been baptized into one body, have been baptized in the Spirit and been made to drink of the Spirit. As the apostle points out, it is therefore a matter of the sovereignty of God in giving us the Holy Spirit in the moment of our conversion—baptized into the body, to give us the gifts that he pleases to give us in their wonderful variety.

Not only does he give them but he reserves the right to use them and move them, with maximum profit of all members of the church. I don't want to labour the point because it is so fearfully self-evident. You cannot introduce organization that runs counter to that without defying the Holy Spirit and denying his lordship, and transgressing against a fundamental provision of salvation.

## 4.

### Question Session

#### **Question 1: Receiving the Holy Spirit**

*The book of Acts records several instances of believers receiving the Holy Spirit, but there are some differences in precisely how and when this took place. Can you help us understand why this should be?*

DWG: This is a large question. I think there are five incidents in the Acts of the Apostles of people receiving the Holy Spirit, and they are different—so different as to appear contradictory. For instance, there is the occasion on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) when the crowd is pricked in its heart and asks, ‘What shall we do?’ Peter’s reply was, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ (vv. 37–38). There the order is repent (it doesn’t even say believe, but obviously it’s implied), be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (that is water baptism of course), and then you shall receive the Holy Spirit. Notice the order: repent, baptized, Holy Spirit.

If you look at the story of Cornelius (Acts 10) you see a very significant difference.

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, ‘Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. (vv. 44–48)

So there it’s the opposite way around: Holy Spirit first, water baptism afterwards. Now just take those two for the moment. Why the difference? Some people would account for it on the grounds of what they call *dispensations*: that this was a changeover. Acts 2 is gospel going to Jews, conditions are special. Now in Acts 10 you’re moving off into the new Christian era and now this is gospel going to Gentiles. Well, of course that is the fact. Acts 2 is gospel to Jews, Acts 10 to Gentiles. But isn’t there something more in it than that?

#### *At Pentecost*

The people that Peter was preaching to on the day of Pentecost were the very same crowd that had stood around the cross of Christ, literally, and had shouted, ‘Crucify him!’ They had done it publicly. They said he wasn’t the Son of God, that he deserved to die. Now they profess that they’ve repented. Now the Bible everywhere, and you’ll see it especially with John the Baptist, isn’t necessarily prepared to take your word that you’ve repented, but will demand that you show that you mean what you say.

‘You say you have repented of having murdered Jesus? All right then, you will be baptized in his name, in the name of Jesus.’

‘Oh, no. I don’t want to do that. That would be awkward.’

‘It may be very awkward but you’ll have to do it. These are the men whose hands are stained with the blood of Christ. You can’t stand with them still and say you’ve repented, for God won’t take any notice of you. You won’t get his Holy Spirit until you show God your repentance is genuine and you’re prepared to stand away from them—save yourself from them. You will now publicly confess him by getting baptized, and if you’re not prepared to do that, sorry—your repentance doesn’t mean anything at all.’

#### *With Cornelius*

When you have Cornelius, there is not that issue, of course. Cornelius hadn’t stood with that crowd who crucified Jesus. He was a God-fearing man and wanted to please God. The very moment he heard about Jesus and knew the gospel of Christ, at that very moment he believed, and the Holy Spirit came on him. And, thereafter, he was baptized. That at least is how I would account for that difference.

#### *Disciples of John the Baptist*

As for the men we read of in Acts 19, my interpretation tries to proceed by pointing to what the text actually says. Paul came across these men, who are described as ‘some disciples’. It does not call them ‘Christians’! He asked them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’

Now please notice what he said. He doesn’t ask whether they were baptized with the Holy Spirit or filled with the Holy Spirit, but did they *receive* the Holy Spirit when they believed. That drew the puzzled reply which I think he expected to draw.

‘No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’

Paul asked them, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’

And they said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’

Well, I’ll let you into the secret: they were not Christians at all! They’d come as far as John’s baptism, which was expressive of repentance for forgiveness of sins, but John the Baptist had no authority to forgive anybody’s sins. He could point you to the one that was to come after him, but you never get any scribes, Pharisees or anybody else bothering John the Baptist and saying, ‘You’re speaking blasphemies: you oughtn’t to tell people their sins are forgiven’—because he never did anyway. He got them confessing their sins. He baptized them as an evidence of their repentance. But for the forgiveness of sins he had to point them to another who was coming; that is to Christ. It is one thing to repent. It is another thing to believe. It is possible to repent and not believe. And not until a man believes on the Lord Jesus does he get the Holy Spirit.

Check my exposition of this. Notice that Paul did not say to them, ‘Well, you’re believers all right, but there is something extra that believers can have now.’ No, he didn’t. He said,

John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus. (Acts 19:4)



So Paul is telling them that they will have to do what John had told them to do—believe on the Lord Jesus. You don't tell people to do that who are already Christians, do you? At this juncture they did believe on the Lord Jesus, of course. Paul didn't then say, 'Well, you've been baptized once so there's no need to go through that again.' No. For they weren't believers when they got baptized the first time. You can't count baptism that happened before you were a believer. Paul isn't being narrow-minded: the whole truth of the gospel is involved in this.

What is Christianity? It is not just a system of repentance. There are many folks in Christendom and honestly before God they confess their sins, in private. You could ask them, 'Are you sure of salvation? When you believed, did you get eternal life? Did you get the Holy Spirit?' I asked precisely that question to some young gentlemen in that White Fathers college I spoke of earlier. They were saying they were children of God, and that they became children of God at their baptism. So I said, 'Oh, how interesting. Now, tell me, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' They didn't know either what I was talking about. Of course they didn't, because they had never learned what it means to believe on the Lord Jesus.

So these men had to learn to believe, and when they believed, they were saved and they received the Holy Spirit. Now they became Christians for the first time, and of course it was the first time. Paul commanded that they had to be baptized as Christians. So I would submit it to you that this is not a question of getting people who were already believers in Christ, who are missing out on some extra spiritual good they could have, and persuading believers in Christ to go in for this extra bit. It is a question of people who were not yet believers in the Lord Jesus, teaching them to believe in the Lord Jesus, and then confess their faith in him and get themselves baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

## Question 2

*They are Christians by the time they're baptized. And then it says that when Paul laid his hands on them they received the Holy Spirit. Then the original question itself—how do you receive the Holy Spirit—when you believed or since you believed? It's a very strange question to ask. Why didn't he just ask them, 'Are you disciples of Jesus?' He asked them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit?'*

DWG: Those are important questions: can I answer the second question first? I think that Paul asked that question for the same kind of reason that I asked my White Fathers the question. If I had said to them, 'When did you become a child of God?' they would have said, 'At baptism'. If I had said, 'When did you become a Christian?' they would have said, 'We've been Christians a long while'. I had to find something to ask that would expose to them that they were missing something without which they weren't Christians at all. I rather think that that was what Paul was saying.

Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. (Rom 8:9)

He isn't a sort of second rate believer: he isn't a believer at all. Therefore, Paul saying, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit?' is equivalent to saying, 'Are you real Christians?' I would submit to you, putting it in that way will expose the fact to them that, in spite of all their terminology, they are not believers.

Why didn't they receive the Holy Spirit in that split second when they believed? I think for a similar reason, though not the same reason, as the one I have quoted you in Acts 2. You will find in this section of Acts that Paul is constantly stressing the difference between Christianity and other things. This is the fifth section of Acts. It begins in chapter 16, and the first issue there in Philippi is the difference between Christianity and spiritism. 'These men,' said the girl with the demon, 'show us the way of salvation. They are the servants of the living God. We're all on the same side, batting for the same team.' 'Oh, no we're not,' says Paul. So long as Paul was prepared to let them say that they were on the same team, all went well. You should have seen the uproar when he said, 'No we're not.' But Paul would insist on the difference between Christianity and spiritism, and here insists on the difference between Christianity and even that good and godly system of thought and practice which was 'John the Baptistism'.

I think it is not ungracious and un-Christian for us to do the same in Christendom. Many folks call themselves Christians who just repent. They've never learned to believe: like Nicodemus, they haven't been born again. Repented, yes, thousands of times. Never believed. We ought to insist on that difference. I think, therefore, in early Acts, the withholding of the Holy Spirit until they'd been baptized and they had been identified with a Christian missionary, as distinct from a John the Baptist thing, was all part of God insisting on this difference.

#### *With the Samaritans*

Let me quote you one other occurrence of the same thing—the incident in Samaria. We read this in Acts 8:

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. (vv. 14–17)

The text doesn't actually tell us explicitly why this happened, as far as I can see, but I suggest to you that it's probably along this line. Samaria was no ordinary place. For centuries the Samaritans had been living in defiance of God's word about Jerusalem, and there had been an unholy schism, full of rank bitterness between Jews and Samaritans. As the Samaritan woman put it to Christ, 'You say that Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Well, we don't. We worship here. Ours is as good as yours.' But our Lord even in his gospel sermons was quite faithful. He said, 'Woman, I want you to know that salvation is of the Jews. You worship what you do not know' (see John 4:19–22). This is a true mark of Christianity: if you've got hold of real Christianity, the thing you've got hold of began very early on with Abraham, down the centuries through Moses, David, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and on to our Lord Jesus Christ, born of the seed of David—a great historic process centred on Jerusalem. If what you've got hold of didn't come that way, then it isn't Christianity, I'm afraid. It's some existential philosophy or something.

And before God will give Samaritans his Holy Spirit, he will insist that they repent of their deliberate defiance of his word over the centuries, and acknowledge that the gospel comes through Jerusalem, through Jerusalem's Messiah. They must submit to the laying on of the hands of men from Jerusalem. If Peter and John had attempted to do it before the Samaritans got converted, the Samaritans would have spat in their face. That's a reason I would suggest. I say I've got no Scripture to prove it, but that is a fact; not until those two apostles from Jerusalem laid on their hands would they get the Holy Spirit. I submit those possible reasons anyway, why in the book of Acts you get these five occasions.

### *Saul of Tarsus*

The fifth one is Saul of Tarsus, and the delayed action there. I suggest, and here's to the present point, it does not alter the fact that our receiving of the Holy Spirit is by grace, through faith, on the same terms as justification itself, for Paul insists on that in Galatians. Though, in his own case, the coming of the Holy Spirit was delayed for another very good reason. I believe that this receiving of the Holy Spirit—in Jerusalem, in Samaria, with Saul of Tarsus and with the Ephesians—is the receiving of the Holy Spirit in the same sense that every believer everywhere receives the Holy Spirit as an initial experience when you trust the Saviour.

### **Question 3**

*Paul is able to argue in his epistles very strongly on the basis of the experience of receiving the Holy Spirit and receiving the Spirit by the grace of the Lord. It seems to me he argues tremendously. He doesn't have to try and persuade them that they've all received the Holy Spirit or that they're indwelt by the Holy Spirit, because they've all probably had an experience something like what happened in Samaria, where there was some outward manifestation, obviously supernatural. Why do you think today there's so much argument and talk about the fact that we've received the Holy Spirit and we've got to convince ourselves of that fact, whereas Paul just accepted it as the norm?*

DWG: Well, as you rightly observe, it is the fact that on these occasions in particular the coming of the Holy Spirit was accompanied with external signs which everybody could see—speaking in tongues and so forth. And of course, Paul could appeal to that. There was no doubt that these things happened. What I would suggest to you is that you should perhaps be just a little bit careful about the deduction you make from that. Are we given to expect that this will be the invariable sign or the invariable accompaniment—the only way we can know that we have the Holy Spirit? The other thing I think you've got to be careful about is to interpret the actual incidents in the light of the plain statements of the theological explanation. Obviously, the right interpretation of the incidents is the one that was square with the theological interpretation. To quote just that verse I quoted before, 'If anybody hasn't the Holy Spirit, he isn't a Christian.' If you, therefore, were to posit from this example that there are some Christians who haven't got the Holy Spirit, you come to a contradiction of the plain, straightforward theological saying. In the second place, I wonder if it's quite true that, say, speaking in tongues as they did on these occasions, is the only way you will know that you've received the Holy Spirit.

Let's take the other statements about his ministry, so that you may know. Romans 8:9 says 'Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.' Well, how do I know I've got the Spirit?

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. (Rom 8:16)

I only want to say that it is very genuine and real and, in fact, continuing. Whatever the accompaniments of my initial reception of the Holy Spirit, the reason I know I've got the Holy Spirit as I stand before you now, honestly before God, is that the Spirit witnesses with my spirit that I am a child of God. Personally I would put much more store by that than I would by miracle workings, because Matthew tells you that miracle workings are not an invariable sign that a man is a believer: a man could cast out demons and not be a believer. So I would put much more store by this inner spiritual testimony of the Holy Spirit.

And then, if you look at Galatians, we read that,

The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other. (5:17)

Well, certainly if I knew nothing about that, I ought to question whether I am a believer. This, in everyday life, is the reality—the Holy Spirit in my life striving against the flesh to perfect my Christian holiness. This I should count, and I'm not saying it irreverently, to be equally important, I nearly said more important, than speaking in tongues, say. As valuable as that is, it can coincide with a good deal of carnality. The reality of the Holy Spirit is witnessed to by his struggle against the flesh in my life.

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' (Gal 4:6)

These, I would have thought, are the things that the Apostle Paul quotes as evidences of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

#### **Question 4: The spiritual gifts**

*What do you feel about spiritual gifts nowadays?*

DWG: Well, that is somewhat a long story. I might be allowed to do that very briefly. On spiritual gifts, I take Paul's arguments in 1 Corinthians 12–14 to be a whole, if you like. To briefly summarize, they are this.

##### *Source of the gifts*

Spiritual gifts are given us by the Lord through the Holy Spirit. The first three verses of chapter 12 tell us that they must be tested. The test is whether they acknowledge the Lordship and divinity of Christ.

##### *Diversity of the gifts*

Now, there are varieties of gifts (vv. 4–11) but it's the same Spirit working and distributing to each one as he chooses. There, I think, we should notice that while some gifts evidence

themselves in what you might call miraculous performances—healings and so on—they are no more spiritual than gifts which manifest themselves in what you might regard as pedestrian in operation, such as slogging away at teaching.

#### *Practical value of the gifts*

Then comes a paragraph, fairly typically Pauline, from verse 12 onwards. I say typically Pauline because you may have noticed Paul's method of argument elsewhere. Where he has an abuse to correct, he will go as far as he can honestly go in sympathy with that point of view, but by the time he's finished, he's writing the opposite extreme. Wise man, was Paul! Here he starts off by saying it doesn't matter what gift there is: they are all necessary and you cannot afford to say that you don't need the other chap's gift. (Some people hold the view that some gifts, notably the miraculous ones that were for signs, finished upon the completion of the canon of Scripture. Now, for argument's sake, let's leave that out for the moment: we're dealing here with a period before the canon was complete anyway and all these various gifts were still around the place.) Paul says, 'Look, you can't afford to say I don't need any one. They are all necessary.' Even the most insignificant ones are necessary. And in addition, he comforts the hearts of the inferiority complex and he puts the superiority complex in their proper position by pointing out how they are divinely appointed, just like the position of the organs in our body. Then he says, 'Of course, there are different gifts but they are not all equally useful.'

#### *The motivation of the gifts*

He's going to make that point at the end of chapter 12, when he steps aside to show what is to be the major issue in all the operation of gift. If gift is going to be proper, edifying and helpful in the church, it must be motivated by love. Otherwise, it becomes just a performance. And love, in this context of course, is love to my fellow man and in particular to my fellow Christians in the church.

#### *Edification from the gifts*

Therefore, when he comes to chapter 14, he urges upon us that we seek spiritual gifts but particularly, and here becomes the change of the emphasis, particularly those gifts that provide edification for the church. The more love, the more will be the desire to edify. Now, go for prophecy, he says, because prophecy is a communication that people can understand. Whereas if in the church you speak, say, in tongues, except there's an interpreter there, nobody understands what you're saying and it isn't, therefore, an exhibition of love. You are not communicating, to use that modern word. You are not helping anybody. The rest are not edified. Bear it in mind when you get up to pray. Despite all exhortations to the contrary, it is your responsibility so to pray that by the time you've finished you've edified your brethren. Some people say you shouldn't pray like that: you should be talking just to God. Well, you should be talking to God, but your brethren are meant to be edified when you've finished.

So the number one consideration is that love must control these gifts, and in practical terms that would mean you must in the church speak in a known tongue so that the people can be edified, or if you speak in tongues there must be an interpreter so they can be edified. Otherwise, it is useless to the church.

*Intellect and the gifts*

Then he comes down to the next paragraph (vv. 13ff) for another consideration. Not only must it be useful to the church and understood by the church, but consider the relation of spirit and intellect. You may say, 'Well, if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays' (v. 14). So it does, your spirit prays, but your intellect is unfruitful. Is that a more profitable situation than praying with your intellect? Paul phrases himself very forcibly in his Greek. 'I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also' (v. 15). He doesn't mean, 'I will pray sometimes in the spirit and other times I will pray in understanding.' He's saying, 'I'll pray with my spirit *but also* (Greek: *de kai*) with my mind.' Then he adds, 'Please, when it comes to grey matter and the use thereof, don't be childish!' It is not a mark of spirituality to despise the intellect. If you can get the intellect working as well as your spirit, it is always preferable. And if that is so in private, how much more so in the church.

*Public perception of the gifts*

Then there is the question of the testimony and the possible dangers to the testimony of speaking in tongues in the church. Paul says that tongues are a sign to the unbeliever; prophecy a sign to the believer (see 14:20ff). Tongues are a sign to the unbeliever. We see that in evidence on the day of Pentecost. These Galilean fishermen got up and they started to talk and people from I don't know how many nations gathered around. First they thought they were drunk. Then one man who came from Parthia heard one apostle speaking in 'Parthigonian'; and another who came from Cappadocia heard him speak in his native tongue. These were obviously fishermen, so how did they know 'Parthigonian' or whatever? It was such a miracle as to call for some explanation, and of course being a sign, it gave Peter the opportunity to explain the story of the gospel. And if you can do that, my brother, my sister, do it as much as you can. If you, being English and knowing no Russian, can speak to a Russian in Russian, so he sees it's a miracle, speak it for all you're worth, so he enquires how you do it, and you're able to tell him about Christ.

But you being in Cambridge, here in Roseford Hall for instance, if you're all speaking in tongues and somebody comes in from the estate and doesn't understand a word you're saying, he'll say you're mad, says Paul. So please don't do it, because of the danger to the testimony.

*'Prophecy' among the gifts*

Prophecy, on the other hand, is a sign to the believer and yet, curiously enough, Paul says that if an unbeliever or outsider comes in and hears what is being said, he will be convicted and the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and he will worship God and recognize that God is really among you (see 14:24–25). How does that come about? Well, it seems to me that the answer is quite simple: I don't know!

Prophecy as distinct from teaching, is not merely a matter of God revealing New Testament truth, but those prophetic ministries in which God is not so much explaining the meaning of a particular passage, but God is speaking a word for a moment, that even the servant who speaks it doesn't know that it exactly fits a man's heart who happens to be there. So that it is evident to the man who's on the receiving end that this is of God. The chap who's speaking could not possibly know. I've known that happen many, many times in conventions

that were set aside merely for teaching. I've known teaching to turn itself into a kind of a prophetic ministry. I have a dear friend who was going to a Christian convention. He was met at the railway station and rushed, post-haste, to a certain place where he was to preach. He got up and expounded the word of God in all innocence. When he sat down, the man who'd brought him from the railway station got up—shame-faced and confused—and said, 'I want all you local brethren to know that I didn't say anything to our brother.' It so fitted a certain, particular circumstance that the church would have thought there had been some collusion, somebody had been spilling the beans. The dear man was wanting to make sure that they knew he hadn't.

That kind of thing happens because it is the living Lord speaking a word right for the moment. He is all-knowing, and whether it be a Christian or someone unconverted, they sense that this is of God. I was told of an instance where there was a great gospel campaign in a tent, and one night there came a man who had been in the courts for murder. There was some deficiency in the evidence and he couldn't be convicted, but it seemed pretty obvious that, despite the legal technicality, he had murdered. The preacher, of course, didn't know him from Adam but in the middle of his gospel address he said, 'If you're a murderer, God can save you.' (He hadn't intended to say it, as he confessed to his brethren afterwards who took him to task for doing such an outlandish thing.) And he got so confused that he went and said it again, 'If you are a murderer, God can save you.' The brethren thought the man would be so outraged he'd do a few more murders. The preacher was entirely innocent.

#### *The Lord's control of the gifts*

I do think that that is an exceedingly solemn thing—to recognize that the living Lord still does control the use of the gifts he has given. And so, adding to my answer on spiritual gifts, in one extreme all are necessary. 'You mustn't forbid speaking in tongues, save only there's an interpreter if it's going to be done in the church' says Paul. But, brothers and sisters, we must remember that we must always use them in love and for the building up of the church.

## About the Author

**DAVID W. GOODING (1925-2019) was Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a Member of the Royal Irish Academy.** He taught the Bible internationally and lectured on its relevance to philosophy and world religions and daily life. He published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.