

# DODS MARCUS

THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE:  
THE FIRST EPISTLE TO  
THE CORINTHIANS

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# Marcus Dods

## The Expositor's Bible: The First Epistle to the Corinthians

### I *INTRODUCTION*

Corinth was the first Gentile city in which Paul spent any considerable time. It afforded him the opportunities he sought as a preacher of Christ. Lying as it did on the famous Isthmus which connected Northern and Southern Greece, and defended by an almost impregnable citadel, it became a place of great political importance. Its position gave it also commercial advantages. Many traders bringing goods from Asia to Italy preferred to unlade at Cenchrea and carry their bales across the narrow neck of land rather than risk the dangers of doubling Cape Malea. So commonly was this done that arrangements were made for carrying the smaller ships themselves across the Isthmus on rollers; and shortly after Paul's visit Nero cut the first turf of an intended, but never finished, canal to connect the two seas.

Becoming by its situation and importance the head of the Achaian League, it bore the brunt of the conqueror's onslaught and was completely destroyed by the Roman general Mummius in the year 146 B.C. For a hundred years it lay in ruins, peopled by few but relic-hunters, who groped among the demolished temples for bits of sculpture or Corinthian brass. The all-discerning eye of Julius Cæsar, however could not overlook the excellence of the site; and accordingly he sent a colony of Roman freedmen, the most industrious of the metropolitan population, to rebuild and replenish the city. Hence the names of Corinthians mentioned in the New Testament are mainly such as betoken a Roman and servile origin, such as Gaius, Fortunatus, Justus, Crispus, Quartus, Achaicus. Under these auspices Corinth speedily regained something of its former beauty, all its former wealth, and apparently more than its original size. But the old profligacy was also to some extent revived; and in Paul's day "to live as they do at Corinth" was the equivalent for living in luxury and licentiousness. Sailors from all parts with a little money to spend, merchants eager to compensate for the privations of a voyage, refugees and adventurers of all kinds, were continually passing through the city, introducing foreign customs and confounding moral distinctions. Too plainly are the innate vices of the Corinthians reflected in this Epistle. On the stage the Corinthian was usually represented drunk, and Paul found that this characteristic vice was allowed to follow his converts even to the communion table. In the letter there are also discernible some reminiscences of what Paul had seen in the Isthmian and gladiatorial contests. He had noted, too, as he walked through Corinth, how the fire of the Roman army had consumed the meaner houses of wood, hay, stubble, but had left standing, though charred, the precious marbles.

Nowhere do we see so clearly as in this Epistle the multifarious and delicate work required of one on whom lay the care of all the Churches. A host of difficult questions poured in upon him: questions regarding conduct, questions of casuistry, questions about the ordering of public worship and social intercourse, as well as questions which struck to the very root of the Christian faith. Are we to dine with our heathen relatives? May we intermarry with those who are not yet Christian? may we marry at all? Can slaves continue in the service of heathen masters? What relation does the Communion hold to our ordinary meals? Is the man who speaks with tongues a superior kind of Christian, and must the prophet who speaks with the Spirit be allowed to interrupt other speakers? Paul in a previous letter had instructed the Corinthians on some of these points, but they had misunderstood him; and he now takes up their difficulties point by point, and finally disposes of

them. Had nothing been required but the solution of practical difficulties, Paul's part had not been so delicate to play. But even through their request for advice there shone the ineradicable Greek vices of vanity, restless intellectualism, litigiousness, and sensuality. They even seemed to be on the perilous brink of glorying in a spurious liberality which could condone vices condemned by the heathen. In these circumstances the calmness and patience with which Paul pronounces on their entanglements are striking. But even more striking are the boundless intellectual vigour, the practical sagacity, the ready application to life, of the profoundest Christian principles. In reading the Epistle, one is amazed at the brevity and yet completeness with which intricate practical problems are discussed, the unerring firmness with which, through all plausible sophistry and fallacious scruples, the radical principle is laid hold of, and the sharp finality with which it is expressed. Nor is there any lack in the Epistle of the warm, rapid, and stirring eloquence which is associated with the name of Paul. It was a happy circumstance for the future of Christianity that in those early days, when there were almost as many wild suggestions and foolish opinions as there were converts, there should have been in the Church this one clear, practical judgment, this pure embodiment of the wisdom of Christianity.

It is in this Epistle we get the clearest view of the actual difficulties encountered by Christianity in a heathen community. We here see the religion of Christ confronted by the culture, and the vices, and the various social arrangements of paganism; we see the ferment and turmoil its introduction occasioned, the changes it wrought in daily life and common customs, the difficulty men honestly experienced in comprehending what their new principles required; we see how the higher aims and views of Christianity sifted the social customs of the ancient world, now allowing and now rejecting; and, above all, we see the principles on which we ourselves must proceed in solving the social and ecclesiastical difficulties that embarrass ourselves. It is in this Epistle, in short, that we see the Apostle of the Gentiles in his proper and peculiar element, exhibiting the applicability of the religion of Christ to the Gentile world and its power, not to satisfy merely the aspirations of devout Jews, but to scatter the darkness and quicken the dead soul of the pagan world.

Paul's experience in Corinth is full of significance. On arriving at Corinth, he went, as usual, to the synagogue; and when his message was rejected by the Jews, he betook himself to the Gentiles. Next door to the synagogue, in the house of a convert called Justus, the Christian congregation was founded; and, to the annoyance of the Jews, one of the rulers of the synagogue, Crispus by name, attached himself to it. The Jewish irritation and envy smouldered until a new governor came from Rome, and then it found vent. This new governor was one of the most popular men of his time, the brother of Nero's tutor, the well-known Seneca. He was himself so markedly the representative of "sweetness and light" that he was commonly spoken of as "the sweet Gallio." The Jews in Corinth evidently fancied that a man of this character would be facile and would desire to make favour with all parties in his new province. They accordingly appealed to him, but were met with a prompt and decided rebuff. Their new governor assured them he had no jurisdiction over such questions. As soon as he hears it is not a matter in which the property or persons of his lieges is implicated he bids his lictors clear the court. The rabble that always gathers round a courthouse, seeing a Jew ignominiously dismissed, set upon him and beat him under the very eye of the judge, the beginning of that furious, unreasoning, brutal outrage which has pursued the Jews in all countries of Christendom.

Gallio has become the synonym for religious indifference. We call the easy-going, good-natured man who meets all your religious appeals with a shrug of the shoulders or a genial, bantering answer a Gallio. This is perhaps a little hard upon Gallio, who no doubt attended to his own religion in much the same spirit as his friends. When the narrative says that "he cared for none of those things," it means that he gave no heed to what seemed a common street brawl. It is rather the haughtiness of the Roman proconsul than the indifference of the man of the world that appears in his conduct. These squabbles among Jews about matters of their law were not affairs he could stoop to investigate or was by his office required to investigate. And yet it is not Gallio's proconsulship of Achaia nor his relationship to Roman celebrities that has made his name familiar to the modern world, but his connection with

these wretched Jews that appeared before his small chair that morning. In Paul's little, insignificant, worn figure it was not to be expected he should see anything so remarkable as to stimulate inquiry; he could not have comprehended that the chief connection in which his name would afterwards appear would be in connection with Paul; and yet had he but known, had he but interested himself in what evidently so deeply interested his new subjects, how different might his own history have become, and how different, too, the history of Christianity. But filled with a Roman's disdain for questions of which the sword could not cut the knot, and with a Roman's reluctance to implicate himself with anything which was not sufficiently of this world to be adjusted by Roman law, he cleared his court and called the next case. The "sweet Gallio," patient and affable to every other kind of complainant, had nothing but disdain and undisguised repugnance for these Eastern dreamers. The Roman, who could sympathize with almost every nationality and find room for all men in the wide lap of the empire, made himself detested in the East by his harsh contempt for mysticism and religion, and was met by a disdain deeper than his own.

"The brooding East with awe beheld  
Her impious younger world;  
The Roman tempest swelled and swelled,  
And on her head was hurled:

The East bowed low before the blast  
In patient, deep disdain;  
She let the legions thunder past,  
And plunged in thought again."

Now in the Englishman there is much that closely resembles the Roman character. There is the same ability for practical achievement, the same capacity for conquest and for making much of conquered peoples, the same reverence for law, the same faculty for dealing with the world and the human race as it actually is! the same relish for and mastery of the present system of things. But along with these qualities there go in both races their natural defects: a tendency to forget the ideal and the unseen in the seen and the actual; to measure all things by material standards; to be more deeply impressed with the conquests of the sword than with those of the Spirit, and with the gains that are counted in coin rather than with those that are seen in character; and to be far more intensely interested in whatever concerns politics than in anything that concerns religion. So pronounced is this materialistic, or at any rate worldly, tendency in this country, that it has been formulated into a system for the conduct of life, under the name of secularism. And so popular has this system become, especially among working-men, that the chief promoter of it believes that his adherents may be numbered by hundreds of thousands.

The essential idea of secularism is "that precedence should be given to the duties of this life over those which pertain to another life," the reason being that this life is the first in certainty, and should therefore be the first in importance. Mr. Holyoake carefully states his position in these words: "We do not say that every man ought to give an *exclusive* attention to this world, because that would be to commit the old sin of dogmatism, and exclude the possibility of another world and of walking by different light from that by which alone we are able to walk. But as our *knowledge* is confined to this life, and testimony, and conjecture, and probability are all that can be set forth with respect to another life, we think we are justified in giving *precedence* to the duties of this state and of attaching primary importance to the morality of man to man." This statement has the merit of being undogmatic, but it is in consequence proportionately vague. If a man is not to give *exclusive* attention to this world, how much attention is he to give to another? Would Mr. Holyoake think the amount of attention most

Christians give to the other world excessive? If so, the attention he thinks suitable must be limited indeed.

But if this theoretical statement, framed in view of the exigencies of controversy, be scarcely intelligible, the position of the practical secularist is perfectly intelligible. He says to himself, I have occupations and duties now that require all my strength; and if there is another world, the best preparation for it I can have is to do thoroughly and with all my strength the duties now pressing upon me. Most of us have felt the attraction of this position. It has a sound of candid, manly common-sense, and appeals to the English character in us, to our esteem for what is practical. Besides, it is perfectly true that the best preparation for any future world is to do thoroughly well the duties of our present state. But the whole question remains, What *are* the duties of the present state? These can not be determined unless we come to some decision as to the truth or untruth of Christianity. If there is a God, it is not merely in the future, but now, that we have duties to Him, that all our duties are tinged with the idea of His presence and of our relation to Him. It is absurd to defer all consideration of God to a future world; God is as much in this world as in any; and if so, our whole life, in every part of it, must be, not a secular, but a godly, life – a life we live well and can only live well when we live it in fellowship with Him. The mind that can divide life into duties of the present and duties that concern the future entirely misapprehends the teaching of Christianity, and misconceives what life is. If a man does not know whether there is a God, then he cannot know what his present duties are, neither can he do these duties as he ought. He may do them better than I can; but he does not do them as well as he himself could were he owning the presence and accepting the gracious, sanctifying influences of the Divine Spirit.

To the help of secularism comes also in our case another influence, which told with Gallio. Even the gentle and affable Gallio felt annoyed that so squalid a case should be among the first that came before him in Achaia. He had left Rome with the good wishes of the Imperial Court, had made a triumphal procession of several weeks to Corinth, had been installed there with all the pomp that Roman officials, military and civil, could devise; he had been met and acknowledged by the authorities, had sworn in his new officers, had caused his tessellated pavement to be laid and his chair of state set down: and as if in mockery of all this ceremony and display of power came this pitiful squabble from the synagogue, a matter of which not a man of standing in his court knew or cared anything, a matter in which Jews and slaves alone were interested. Christianity has always found its warmest supporters in the lower strata of society. It has not always been quite respectable. And here again Englishmen are like Romans: they are strongly influenced by what is respectable, by what has position and standing in the world. If Christianity were zealously promoted by princes, and leading officials, and distinguished professors and writers of genius, how much easier would it be to accept it; but its most zealous promoters are so commonly men of no education, men with odd names, men whose grammar and pronunciation put them beyond the pale of good society, men whose methods are rough and whose views are unphilosophical and crude. As in Corinth, so now, not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; and we must beware therefore of shrinking, as Gallio did, from what is essentially the most powerful agent for good in the world because it is so often found with vulgar and repulsive adjuncts. The earthen vessels, as Paul reminds us, the pots of coarsest clay, chipped and crusted with coarse contact with the world, may yet hold treasure of priceless value.

It is always a question how far we should endeavour to become all things to all men, to win the wise of this world by presenting Christianity as a philosophy, and to win the well-born and cultured by presenting it in the dress of an attractive style. Paul as he left Athens, where he had met with so little success, was apparently exercised with this same question. He had tried to meet the Athenians on their own ground, showing his familiarity with their writers; but he seems to think that at Corinth another method may be more successful, and, as he tells them, "I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." It was, he says, with much fear and trembling he adopted this course; he was weak and dispirited at the time, at any rate; and it is plain that his resolve to abandon

all such appeals as might tell with rhetoricians cost him an effort and made a deep impression upon him. He himself saw so clearly the foolishness of the Cross; he knew so well what a field for mockery was presented to the Greek mind by the preaching of salvation through a crucified person. He was very conscious of the poor appearance he made as a speaker among these fluent Greeks, whose ears were as cultivated as musicians', and whose sense of beauty, trained by seeing their picked young men contend in the games, received a shock from "his weak and contemptible bodily presence," as they called it. Yet, all things considered, he made up his mind that he would trust his success to the simple statement of facts. He would preach "Christ and Him crucified." He would tell them what Jesus had been and done. He felt jealous of anything which might attract men to his preaching save the Cross of Christ. And he was more successful in Corinth than he had been elsewhere. In that profligate city he was obliged to stay eighteen months, because the work so grew under his hand.

And so it has ever been since. As matter of fact, it is not Christ's teaching, but His death, which has kindled the enthusiasm and the devotion of men. It is this which has conquered and won them, and delivered them from the bondage of self, and set them in a larger world. It is when we believe that this Person has loved us with a love stronger than death that we become His. It is when we can use Paul's words "who loved me and gave Himself for me" that we feel, as Paul felt, the constraining power of this love. It is this that forms between the soul and Christ that secret tie which has been the strength and happiness of so many lives. If our own life is neither strong nor happy, it is because we are not admitting the love of Christ, and are striving to live independently of Him who is our Life. Christ is the perennial fountain of love, of hopefulness, of true spiritual life. In Him there is enough to purify, and brighten, and sustain all human life. Brought into contact with the intellectualism and the vice of Corinth, the love of Christ proved its reality and its overcoming strength; and when we bring it into contact with ourselves, burdened, and perplexed, and tempted as we are, we find that still it is the power of God unto salvation.

## **THE CHURCH IN CORINTH**

"Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their's and our's: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in everything ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge: even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." – 1 Cor. i. 2-9.

## II

### ***THE CHURCH IN CORINTH***

In the year 58 A.D., when Paul wrote this Epistle, Corinth was a city with a mixed population, and conspicuous for the turbulence and immorality commonly found in seaports frequented by traders and seamen from all parts of the world. Paul had received letters from some of the Christians in Corinth which disclosed a state of matters in the Church far from desirable. He had also more particular accounts from some members of Chloe's household who were visiting Ephesus, and who told him how sadly disturbed the little community of Christians was by party spirit and scandals in life and worship.

In the letter itself the designation of the writer and of those addressed first claims our attention.

The writer identifies himself as "Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ by call, through the will of God." An Apostle is one sent, as Christ was sent by the Father. "As the Father sent Me, even so send I you." It was therefore an office no one could take to himself, nor was it the promotion resulting from previous service. To the apostleship the sole entrance was through the call of Christ; and in virtue of this call Paul became, as he says, an Apostle. And it is this which explains one of the most prominent of his characteristics: the singular combination of humility and authority, of self-depreciation and self-assertion. He is filled with a sense of his own unworthiness; he is "less than the least of the Apostles," "not worthy to be called an Apostle." On the other hand, he never hesitates to command the Churches, to rebuke the foremost man in the Church, to assert his claim to be listened to as the ambassador of Christ.

This extraordinary humility and equally remarkable boldness and authority had one common root in his perception that it was through Christ's call and by God's will he was an Apostle. The work of going to all the busiest parts of the world and proclaiming Christ was to his mind far too great a work for him to aspire to at his own instance. He could never have aspired to such a position as this gave him. But God called him to it; and, with this authority at his back, he feared nothing, neither hardship nor defeat.

And this is for us all the true and eternal source of humility and confidence. Let a man feel sure that he is called of God to do what he is doing, let him be fully persuaded in his own mind that the course he follows is God's will for him, and he will press on undauntedly, even though opposed. It is altogether a new strength with which a man is inspired when he is made conscious that God calls him to do this or that, when behind conscience or the plain requirements of human affairs and circumstances the presence of the living God makes itself felt. Well may we exclaim, with one who had to stand alone and follow a solitary path, conscious only of God's approval, and sustained by that consciousness against the disapproval of all, "Oh that we could take that simple view of things as to feel that the one thing which lies before us is to please God! What gain is it to please the world, to please the great, nay even to please those whom we love, compared with this? What gain is it to be applauded, admired, courted, followed, compared with this one aim of not being disobedient to a heavenly vision?"

In addressing the Church at Corinth, Paul unites with himself a Christian called Sosthenes. This was the name of the chief ruler of the synagogue at Corinth who was beaten by the Greeks in Gallio's court, and it is not impossible that it was he who was now with Paul in Ephesus. If so, this would account for his being associated with Paul in writing to Corinth. What share in the letter Sosthenes actually had it is impossible to say. He may have written it to Paul's dictation; he may have suggested here and there a point to be touched upon. Certainly Paul's easy assumption of a friend as joint writer of the letter sufficiently shows that he had no such stiff and formal idea of inspiration as we have. Apparently he did not stay to inquire whether Sosthenes was qualified to be the author of a canonical

book; but knowing the authoritative position he had held among the Jews of Corinth, he naturally conjoins his name with his own in addressing the new Christian community.

The persons to whom this letter is addressed are identified as "the Church of God which is at Corinth." With them are joined in character, if not as recipients of this letter, "all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord." And therefore we should perhaps not be far wrong if we were to gather from this that Paul would have defined the Church as the company of all those persons who "call upon the name of Jesus Christ." Calling upon the name of any one implies trust in him; and those who call upon the name of Jesus Christ are those who look up to Christ as their supreme Lord, able to supply all their need. It is this belief in one Lord which brings men together as a Christian Church.

But at once we are confronted with the difficulty that many persons who call upon the name of the Lord do so with no inward conviction of their need, and consequently with no real dependence upon Christ or allegiance to Him. In other words, the apparent Church is not the real Church. Hence the distinction between the Church visible, which consists of all who nominally or outwardly belong to the Christian community, and the Church invisible, which consists of those who inwardly and really are the subjects and people of Christ. Much confusion of thought is avoided by keeping in mind this obvious distinction. In the Epistles of Paul it is sometimes the ideal, invisible Church which is addressed or spoken of; sometimes it is the actual, visible Church, imperfect, stained with unsightly blots, calling for rebuke and correction. Where the visible Church is, and of whom composed, we can always say; its members can be counted, its property estimated, its history written. But of the invisible Church no man can fully write the history, or name the members, or appraise its properties, gifts, and services.

From the earliest times it has been customary to say that the true Church must be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. That is true if the Church invisible be meant. The true body of Christ, the company of persons who in all countries and ages have called upon Christ and served Him, do form one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. But it is not true of the Church visible and disastrous consequences have at various times followed the attempt to ascertain by the application of these notes which actual visible Church has the best claim to be considered the true Church.

Without concerning himself explicitly to describe the distinguishing features of the true Church, Paul here gives us four notes which must always be found<sup>1</sup>: —

1. Consecration. The Church is composed of "them that have been sanctified in Christ Jesus."
2. Holiness: "called to be saints."
3. Universality: "all that in every place call on the name," etc.
4. Unity: "both their Lord and ours."

1. The true Church is, first of all, composed of consecrated people. The word "sanctify" bears here a somewhat different meaning from that which we commonly attach to it. It means rather that which is set apart or destined to holy uses than that which has been made holy. It is in this meaning the word is used by our Lord when He says, "For your sakes I sanctify" – or set apart – "Myself." The Church by its very existence is a body of men and women set apart for a holy use. The New Testament word for Church, *ecclesia*, means a society "called out" from among other men. It exists not for common purposes, but to witness for God and for Christ, to maintain before the eyes and in all the common ways and works of men the ideal life realized in Christ and the presence and holiness of God. It becomes those who form the Church to meet God's purpose in calling them out of the world and to consider themselves as devoted and set apart to attain that purpose. Their destination is no longer that of the world; and a spirit set upon the attainment of the joys and advantages the world gives is wholly out of place in them.

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<sup>1</sup> Comp. F. W. Robertson's *Lectures on Corinthians*.

2. More particularly those who compose the Church are called to be "saints." Holiness is the unmistakable characteristic of the true Church. The glory of God, inseparable from His essence, is His holiness, His eternally willing and doing only what is the very best. To think of God as doing wrong is blasphemy. Were God even once to do other than the best and right, the loving and just thing, He would cease to be God. It is the task of the Church to exhibit in human life and character this holiness of God's. Those whom God calls into His Church, He calls to be, above all else, holy.

The Church of Corinth was in some danger of forgetting this. One of its members in particular had been guilty of a scandalous breach even of the heathen code of morals; and of him Paul uncompromisingly says, "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person." Even with sinners of a less flagrant sort, no communion was to be held. "If any man that is called a brother" – that is, claiming to be a Christian – "be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such a one you must not even eat." No doubt there is risk and difficulty in administering this law. The graver hidden sin may be overlooked, the more obvious and venial transgression be punished. But the duty of the Church to maintain its sanctity is undeniable, and those who act for the Church must do their best in spite of all difficulty and risk.

The prime duty, however, lies with the members, not with the rulers, in the Church. Those whose function it is to watch over the purity of the Church would be saved from all doubtful action were the individual members alive to the necessity of holy living. This, they should bear in mind, is the very object of the Church's existence and of their being in it.

3. Thirdly, it is ever to be borne in mind that the true Church of Christ is to be found, not in one country nor in one age, not in this or that Church, whether it assume the title of "Catholic" or pride itself on being national, but is composed of "all that in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Happily the time is gone by when with any show of reason any one Church can claim to be catholic on the ground of its being coextensive with Christendom. It is true that Cardinal Newman, one of the most striking figures and probably the greatest Churchman of our own generation, attached himself to the Church of Rome on this very ground: that it possessed this note of catholicity. To his eye, accustomed to survey the fortunes and growth of Christ's Church during the early and mediæval centuries, it seemed that the Church of Rome alone had any reasonable claim to be considered the Church catholic. But he was betrayed, as others have been, by confounding the Church visible with the Church invisible. No one visible Church can claim to be the Church catholic. Catholicity is not a matter of more or less; it cannot be determined by a majority. No Church which does not claim to contain the whole of Christ's people without exception can claim to be catholic. Probably there are some who accept this alternative, and do not see it to be absurd to claim for any one existing Church that it is coextensive with the Church of Christ.

4. The fourth note of the Church here implied is its unity. The Lord of all the Churches is one Lord; in this allegiance they centre, and by it are held together in a true unity. Plainly this note can belong only to the Church invisible, and not to that multifarious collection of incoherent fragments known as the visible Church. It is indeed doubtful whether a visible unity is desirable. Considering what human nature is and how liable men are to be overawed and imposed upon by what is large, it is probably quite as conducive to the spiritual well-being of the Church that she is broken up into parts. Outward divisions into national Churches and Churches under different forms of government and holding various creeds would sink into insignificance, and be no more bewailed than the division of an army into regiments, were there the real unity which springs from true allegiance to the common Lord and zeal for the common cause rather than for the interests of our own particular Church. When the generous rivalry exhibited by some of our regiments in battle passes into envy, unity is destroyed; and indeed the attitude sometimes assumed towards sister-Churches is rather that of hostile armies than of rival regiments striving which can do most honour to the common flag. One of the hopeful signs of our times is that this is generally understood. Christian people are beginning to see how much more important are those points on which the whole Church is agreed than those often obscure or

trivial points which split the Church into sects. Churches are beginning to own with some sincerity that there are Christian gifts and graces in all Churches, and that no one Church comprises all the excellences of Christendom. And the only outward unity that is worth having is that which springs from inward unity, from a genuine respect and regard for all who own the same Lord and spend themselves in His service.

Paul, with his usual courtesy and instinctive tact, introduces what he has to say with a hearty acknowledgment of the distinctive excellences of the Corinthian Church: "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything ye have been enriched in Him, in all utterance and in all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you." Paul was one of those large-natured men who rejoice more in the prosperity of others than in any private good fortune. The envious soul is glad when things go no better with others than with himself, but the generous and unselfish are lifted out of their own woes by their sympathy with the happy. Paul's joy – and it was no mean or shallow joy – was to see the testimony he had borne to Christ's goodness and power confirmed by the new energies and capacities which were developed in those who believed his testimony. The gifts which the Christians in Corinth exhibited made it manifest that the Divine presence and power proclaimed by Paul were real. His testimony regarding the risen but unseen Lord was confirmed by the fact that those who believed this testimony and called upon the name of the Lord received gifts not previously enjoyed by them. Further argument regarding the actual and present power of the unseen Lord was needless in Corinth. And in our day it is the new life of believers which most strongly confirms the testimony regarding the risen Christ. Every one who attaches himself to the Church either damages or aids the cause of Christ, propagates either belief or unbelief. In the Corinthians Paul's testimony regarding Christ was confirmed by their reception of the rare gifts of utterance and knowledge. It is indeed somewhat ominous that the incorruptible honesty of Paul can only acknowledge their possession of "gifts," not of those fine Christian graces which distinguished the Thessalonians and others of his converts. But the grace of God must always adjust itself to the nature of the recipient; it fulfils itself by means of the material which nature furnishes. The Greek nature was at all times lacking in seriousness, and had attained little moral robustness; but for many centuries it had been trained to admire and excel in intellectual and oratorical displays. The natural gifts of the Greek race were quickened and directed by grace. Their intellectual inquisitiveness and apprehensiveness enabled them to throw light on the grounds and results of the Christian facts; and their fluent and flexible speech formed a new wealth and a more worthy employment in their endeavours to formulate Christian truth and exhibit Christian experience. Each race has its own contribution to make to complete and full-grown Christian manhood. Each race has its own gifts; and only when grace has developed all these gifts in a Christian direction can we actually see the fitness of Christianity for all men and the wealth of the nature and work of Christ, which can appeal to and best develop all.

Paul thanked God for their gift of utterance. Perhaps had he lived now, within sound of an utterance dizzying and ceaseless as the roar of Niagara, he might have had a word to say in praise of silence. There is more than a risk nowadays that talk take the place of thought on the one hand and of action on the other. But it could not fail to occur to Paul that this Greek utterance, with the instrument it had in the Greek language, was a great gift to the Church. In no other language could he have found such adequate, intelligible, and beautiful expression for the new ideas to which Christianity gave birth. And in this new gift of utterance among the Corinthians he may have seen promise of a rapid and effective propagation of the Gospel. For indeed there are few more valuable gifts the Church can receive than utterance. Legitimately may we hope for the Church when she so apprehends her own wealth in Christ as to be stirred to invite all the world to share with her, when through all her members she feels the pressure of thoughts that demand utterance, or when there arise in her even one or two persons with the rare faculty of swaying large audiences, and touching the common human heart, and lodging in the public mind some germinant ideas. New epochs in the Church's life

are made by the men who speak, not to satisfy the expectation of an audience, but because they are driven by an inward compelling force, not because they are called upon to say something, but because they have that in them which they must say.

But utterance is well backed by knowledge. Not always has it been remembered that Paul recognises knowledge as a gift of God. Often, on the contrary, has the determination to satisfy the intellect with Christian truth been reprehended as idle and even wicked. To the Corinthians the Christian revelation was new, and inquiring minds, could not but endeavour to harmonize the various facts it conveyed. This attempt to understand Christianity was approved. The exercise of the human reason upon Divine things was encouraged. The faith which accepted testimony was a gift of God, but so also was the knowledge which sought to recommend the contents of this testimony to the human mind.

But however rich in endowments the Corinthians were, they could not but feel, in common with all other men, that no endowment can lift us above the necessity of conflict with sin or put us beyond the hazard which that conflict entails. In point of fact, richly endowed men are often most exposed to temptation, and feel more keenly than others the real hazard of human life. Paul therefore concludes this brief introduction by assigning the reason of his assurance that they will be blameless in the day of Christ; and that reason is that God is in the matter: "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." God calls us with a purpose in view, and is faithful to that purpose. He calls us to the fellowship of Christ that we may learn of Him and become suitable agents to carry out the whole will of Christ. To fear that, notwithstanding our hearty desire to become of Christ's mind and notwithstanding all our efforts to enter more deeply into His fellowship, we shall yet fail, is to reflect upon God as either insincere in His call or inconstant. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. They are not revoked on further consideration. God's invitation comes to us, and is not withdrawn, even though it is not met with the hearty acceptance it deserves. All our obstinacy in sin, all our blindness to our true advantage, all our lack of anything like generous self-devotion, all our frivolity, and folly, and worldliness, are understood before the call is given. By calling us into the fellowship of His Son God guarantees to us the possibility of our entering into that fellowship and of becoming fit for it.

Let us then revive our hopes and renew our belief in the worth of life by remembering that we are called to the fellowship of Jesus Christ. This is satisfying; all else that calls us in life is defective and incomplete. Without this fellowship with what is holy and eternal, all we find in life seems trivial or is embittered to us by the fear of loss. In worldly pursuits there is excitement; but when the fire burns out, and the cold ashes remain, chill and blank desolation is the portion of the man whose all has been the world. We cannot reasonably and deliberately choose the world; we may be carried away by greed, or carnality, or earthliness to seek its pleasures, but our reason and our better nature cannot approve the choice. Still less does our reason approve that what we cannot deliberately choose we should yet allow ourselves to be governed by and actually join in fellowship of the closest kind. Believe in God's call, listen to it, strive to maintain yourself in the fellowship of Christ, and every year will tell you that God, who has called you, is faithful and is bringing you nearer and nearer to what is stable, happy, and satisfying.

## THE FACTIONS

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you

saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other." – 1 Cor. i. 10-16.

### III

## ***THE FACTIONS***

The first section of this Epistle, extending from the tenth verse of the first chapter to the end of the fourth chapter, is occupied with an endeavour to quench the factious spirit which had shown itself in the Corinthian Church. Paul, with his accustomed frankness, tells the Corinthians from whom he had received information regarding them. Some members of the household of Chloe who were then in Ephesus were his informants. Chloe was evidently a woman well known in Corinth, and probably was resident there, although it has with some reason been remarked that it "is more in harmony with St. Paul's discretion to suppose that she was an Ephesian known to the Corinthians, whose people had been in Corinth and returned to Ephesus."<sup>2</sup> The danger of this factious spirit, which in subsequent ages has so grievously weakened the Church and hindered her work, seemed to Paul so urgent that he abruptly adjured them to unity of sentiment and of confession by that name which was at once "the bond of union and the most holy name by which they could be entreated." Before speaking of the important topics he wished to discuss, he must first of all give them to understand that he does not write to a party, but seeks to win the ear of a whole and united Church.

The parties in the Corinthian Church had not as yet outwardly separated from one another. The members were known as belonging to this or that party, but they worshipped together and had not as yet renounced one another's communion. They differed in doctrine, but their faith in one Lord held them together.

Of these parties Paul names four. There were first of all those who held by Paul himself and the aspect of the Gospel he had presented. They owed to him their own salvation; and having experienced the efficacy of his gospel, they could not believe that there was any other efficacious mode of presenting Christ to men. And gradually they became more concerned to uphold Paul's authority than to help the cause of Christ. They probably fell into the mistake to which all mere partisans are liable, and became more Pauline than Paul himself, magnifying his peculiarities and attaching importance to casual sayings and private practices of his which were in themselves indifferent. There was apparently some danger that they might become more Pauline than Christian, should allow their indebtedness to Paul to obscure their debt to Christ, and should so pride themselves in the teacher as to neglect the thing taught.

There was a second party, grouped round Apollos. This learned and eloquent Alexandrian had come to Corinth after Paul left, and what Paul had planted he so successfully watered that many seemed to owe everything to him. Until he came and fitted the Gospel into their previous knowledge, and showed them its relations to other faiths, and opened up to them its ethical wealth and bearing on life, they had been unable to make full use of Paul's teaching. He had sown the seed in their minds; they had owned the truth of his statements and accepted them; but until they heard Apollos they could not lay hold on the truth with sufficient definiteness, and could not boldly act upon it. The teaching of Apollos was not opposed to Paul's, but supplementary of it. At the end of this letter Paul tells the Corinthians that he had asked Apollos to revisit them, but Apollos had refused, and refused very probably because he was aware that a party had been formed in his name, and that his presence in Corinth would only foster and increase it. It is obvious therefore that there was no jealousy between Paul and Apollos themselves, whatever rivalry might exist among their followers.

The third party gloried in the name of Cephas; that is, Peter, the Apostle of the circumcision. It is possible that Peter had been in Corinth, but it is not necessary to suppose so. His name was used in opposition to Paul's as representing the original group of Apostles who had companied with the

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<sup>2</sup> Evans.

Lord in His lifetime, and who adhered to the observance of the Jewish law. How far the party of Cephas in Corinth indulged in disparagement of Paul's authority we cannot exactly say. There are indications, however, in the Epistle that they cited against him even his self-denial, arguing that he did not dare either to ask the Church to maintain him or to marry, as Peter had done, because he felt that his claim to be an Apostle was insecure. It may be imagined how painful it must have been for a high-minded man like Paul to be compelled to defend himself against such accusations, and with what mingled indignation and shame he must have written the words, "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other Apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?" This party then had in it more dangerous elements than the party of Apollos. Extreme Judaizers would find among its members a soil prepared for their apparently conservative and orthodox but really obstructive and pernicious teaching.

Of the fourth party, which named itself "of Christ," we learn more in the Second Epistle than in the First. From a striking and powerful outburst in that Epistle (2 Cor. x. 7-xii. 18), it would appear that the Christ party was formed and led by men who prided themselves on their Hebrew descent (xi. 22), and on having learned their Christianity, not from Paul, Apollos, or Cephas, but from Christ Himself (1 Cor. i. 12; 2 Cor. x. 7). These men came to Corinth with letters of commendation (2 Cor. iii. 1), probably from Palestine, as they had known Jesus, but not from the Apostles in Jerusalem, for they separated themselves from the Petrine party in Corinth. They claimed to be apostles of Christ (2 Cor. xi. 13) and "ministers of righteousness" (xi. 15); but as they taught "another Jesus," "another spirit," "another gospel" (xi. 4), Paul does not hesitate to denounce them as false apostles and ironically to hold them up as "out-and-out apostles." As yet, however, at the date of the First Epistle, they had either not so plainly shown their true colours, or Paul was not aware of all the evil they were doing.

The Apostle hears of these four parties with dismay. What then would he think of the state of the Church now? There was as yet in Corinth no schism, no secession, no outward disruption of the Church; and indeed Paul does not seem to contemplate as possible that which in our day is the normal condition: a Church broken up into little sections, each of which worships by itself, and looks upon the rest with some distrust or contempt. It did not as yet appear possible that the members of the one body of Christ should refuse to worship their common Lord in fellowship with one another and in one place. The evils attaching to such a condition of things may no doubt be unduly magnified; but we are probably more inclined to overlook than to magnify the mischief done by disunion in the Church. The Church was intended to be the grand uniter of the race. Within its pale all kinds of men were to be gathered. Distinctions were to be obliterated; differences were to be forgotten; the deepest thoughts and interests of all men were to be recognised as common; there was to be neither Jew nor Gentile, Greek nor barbarian, bond nor free. But instead of uniting men otherwise alienated, the Church has alienated neighbours and friends; and men who will do business together, who will dine together, will not worship together. Thus the Church has lost a large part of her strength. Had the kingdom of Christ been visibly one, it would have been supreme and without a rival in the world. Had there been union where there has been division, the rule and influence of Christ would have so far surpassed every other influence that peace and truth, right and justice, godliness and mercy, would have everywhere reigned. But instead of this the strength of the Church has been frittered away in civil strife and party warfare, her ablest men have spent themselves in controversy, and through division her influence has become insignificant. The world looks on and laughs while it sees the Church divided against itself and wrangling over petty differences while it ought to be assailing vice, ungodliness, and ignorance. And yet schism is thought no sin; and that which the Reformers shuddered at and shrank from, that secession which they feared to make even from a Church so corrupt as that of Rome then was, every petty ecclesiastic now presumes to initiate.

Now that the Church is broken into pieces, perhaps the first step towards a restoration of true unity is to recognise that there may be real union without unity of external organization. In other words, it is quite possible that Churches which have individually a separate corporate existence – say

the Presbyterian, Independent, and Episcopalian Churches – may be one in the New Testament sense. The human race is one; but this unity admits of numberless varieties and diversities in appearance, in colour, in language, and of endless subordinate divisions into races, tribes, and nations. So the Church may be truly one, one in the sense intended by our Lord, one in the *unity of the Spirit* and the bond of peace, though there continue to be various divisions and sects. It may very well be argued that, constituted as human nature is, the Church, like every other society or institution, will be the better of a competing, if not an opposing, rival; that schism, divisions, sects, are necessary evils; that truth will be more thoroughly investigated, discipline more diligently and justly maintained, useful activities more vigorously engaged in, if there be rival Churches than if there be one. And it is certainly true that, so far as man can foresee, there is no possibility, not to say prospect, of the Church of Christ becoming one vast visible organization. Oneness in that sense is prevented by the very same obstacles that hinder all States and governments on earth from being merged into one great kingdom. But as amidst all diversities of government and customs it is the duty of States to remember and maintain their common brotherhood and abstain from tyranny, oppression, and war, so it is the duty of Churches, however separate in creed or form of government, to maintain and exhibit their unity. If the sects of the Church will frankly and cordially recognise one another as parts of the same whole, if they will exhibit their relationship by combining in good works, by an interchange of ecclesiastical civilities, by aiding one another when aid is needed, this is, I conceive, real union. Certainly Churches which see it to be their duty to maintain a separate existence ought to be equally careful to maintain a real unity with all other Churches.

Again, it is to be borne in mind that there may be real union without unity in creed. As Churches may be truly one though, for the sake of convenience or of some conscientious scruple, they maintain a separate existence, so the unity required in the New Testament is not uniformity of belief in respect to all articles of faith. This uniformity is desirable; it is desirable that all men know the truth. Paul here and elsewhere entreats his readers to endeavour to agree and be of one mind. It is quite true that the Church has gained much by difference of opinion. It is true that were all men to be agreed there might be a danger of truth becoming lifeless and forgotten for want of the stimulus it derives from assault, and discussion, and cross-questioning. It is undoubtedly the fact that doctrine has been ascertained and developed precisely in proportion and in answer to the errors and mistakes of heretics; and were all assault and opposition even now to cease, there might be some danger of a lifeless treatment of truth ensuing. And yet no one can desire that men be in error; no one can wish heresies to multiply that the Church may be stimulated. A visitation of cholera may result in cleanliness and carefulness, but no one desires that cholera may come. Opposition in Parliament is an acknowledged service to the country, yet each party desires that its sentiments become universal. So, too, notwithstanding every good result which may flow from diversity of opinion regarding Divine truth, agreement and unanimity are what all should aim at. We may even see reason to believe that men will never all think alike; we may think that it is not in the nature of things that men of diverse natural disposition, diverse experience and upbringing, should think the same thing; if it is true, as a great thinker has said, that "our system of thought is very often only the history of our heart," then the effort to bring men to precise uniformity of thought is hopeless: and yet this effort must be made. No man who believes he has found the truth can forbear disseminating it to the utmost of his ability. If his favourite views are opposed in conversation, he does what he can to convince and make converts of his antagonists. There is truth, there is a right and a wrong, and it is not all the same whether we know the truth or are in error; and doctrine is simply truth expressed: and though the whole truth may not be expressed, yet even this partial expression of it may be much safer and nearer what we ought to believe than some current denial of the truth. Paul wishes people to believe certain things, not as if then they would be fully enlightened, but because so far they will be enlightened and so far defended against error.

But the question remains, What truths are to be made terms of communion? Is schism or secession ever justifiable on the ground that error is taught in the Church?

This is a question most difficult to answer. The Church of Christ is formed of those who are trusting to Him as the power of God unto salvation. He is in communion with all who thus trust Him, whether their knowledge be great or small; and we cannot refuse to communicate with those with whom He is in communion. And it may very reasonably be questioned whether any part of the Church has a right to identify herself with a creed which past experience proves that the whole Church will never adopt, and which therefore necessarily makes her schismatic and sectarian. As manifestoes or didactic summaries of truth, confessions of faith may be very useful. Systematic knowledge is at all times desirable; and as a backbone to which all the knowledge we acquire may be attached a catechism or confession of faith is part of the necessary equipment of a Church. But no doctrinal error which does not subvert personal faith in Christ should be allowed to separate Churches. Theology must not be made more of than Christianity. We cannot pay too much attention to doctrine or too earnestly contend for the faith; we cannot too anxiously seek to have and to disseminate clear views of truth: but if we make our clear views a reason for quarrelling with other Christians and a bar to our fellowship with them, we forget that Christ is more than doctrine and charity better than knowledge.

Paul certainly was contemplating Christ, and not a creed, as the principle and centre of the Church's unity, when he exclaimed, "Is Christ divided?" The indivisible unity of Christ Himself is in Paul's mind the sufficient argument for the unity of the Church. If you can divide the one Christ, and if one Church can live on one part, another on another, then you may have several Churches; but if there be one Christ indivisible, then is there but one Church indivisible. In all Christians and in all Churches the one Christ is the life of each. And it is monstrous that those who are vitally united to one Person and quickened by one Spirit should in no way recognise their unity.

It is with something akin to horror that Paul goes on to ask, "Was Paul crucified for you?" He implies that only on the death of Christ can the Church be founded. If those who prided themselves on being followers of Paul were in danger of exalting him into the place of Christ, they were forfeiting their salvation, and had no right to be in the Church at all. Take away the death of Christ and the personal connection of the believer with the crucified Redeemer, and you take away the Church.

From this casual expression of Paul we see his habitual attitude towards Christ; and more distinctly than from any laboured exposition do we gather that in his mind the pre-eminence of Christ was unique, and that this pre-eminence was based upon His crucifixion. Paul understood, and was never slow to affirm, the indebtedness of the young Christian Churches to himself: he was their father, and without him they would not have existed. But he was not their saviour, the foundation on which they were built. Not for one moment did he suppose that he could occupy towards men the position Christ occupied. That position was unique, altogether distinct from the position he occupied. No one could share with Christ in being the Head of the Church and the Saviour of the body. Paul did not think of Christ as of one among many, as of the best among many who had done well. He did not think of Him as the best among renowned and useful teachers, as one who had added to what previous teachers had been building. He thought of His work as so transcending and distinct from the work of other men that it was with a kind of horror he saw that there was even a possibility of some confounding his own apostolic work with the work of Christ. He fervently thanks God that he had not even baptized many persons at Corinth, lest it should be supposed he had baptized them into his own name, and so implied, as baptism implies, that men were to acknowledge him as their leader and head. Had the chief part of Christ's work been its lesson in self-sacrifice, might not Paul's life have very well rivalled it, and might not those who had themselves seen the life of Paul and felt the power of his goodness have been forgiven if they felt more indebted to him than to the more remote Jesus?

The ever-recurring disposition then to reduce the work of Christ to the level of comparison with the work done for the race by other men must take account of this expression which reveals to us Paul's thought about it. Certainly Paul understands that between his work and the work of Christ an impassable gulf is fixed. Paul was wholly devoted to his fellow-men, had suffered and was prepared again to suffer any hardships and outrage in their cause, but it seemed to him monstrous that any

person should confound the influence of his work with that of Christ's. And that which gave Christ this special place and claim was His crucifixion. We miss what Paul found in the work of Christ so long as we look more to His life than to His death. Paul does not say, Was Paul your teacher in religion, and did he lead your thoughts to God? did Paul by his life show you the beauty of self-sacrifice and holiness? but "Was Paul crucified for you?" It was Christ's death for His people which gave Him the unique claim on their allegiance and devotedness. The Church is founded on the Cross.

It was not, however, the mere fact of His dying which gave Christ this place, and which claims the regard and trust of all men. Paul had really given his life for men; he had been more than once taken up for dead, having by the truth he taught provoked the hatred of the Jews, even as Jesus had done. But even this did not bring him into rivalry with the unapproachable Redeemer. Paul knew that in Christ's death there was a significance his own could never have. It was not only human self-sacrifice that was there manifested, but Divine self-sacrifice. It was as God's Representative Christ died as truly as He died as man's Representative. This Paul could not do. In Christ's death there was what there could be in none other: a sacrifice for the sins of men and an atonement for these sins. Through this death sinners find a way back to God and assurance of salvation. There was a work accomplished by it which the purest of men could not help Him in, but must himself depend upon and receive the benefit of. Christ by His death is marked off from all men, He being the Redeemer, they the redeemed.

This exceptional, unique work then – what have we made of it? Paul, probably on the whole the most richly endowed man, morally and intellectually, the world has seen, found his true life and his true self in the work of this other Person. It was in Christ Paul first learned how great a thing human life is, and it was through Christ and His work Paul first came into fellowship with the true God. This greatest of men owed everything to Christ, and was so inwardly convinced of this that, heart and soul, he yielded himself to Christ, and gloried in serving Him. How is it with us? Does the work of Christ actually yield to us those grand results it yielded to Paul? Or is the greatest reality in this human world of ours wholly resultless so far as we are concerned? It filled Paul's mind, his heart, his life; it left him nothing else to desire: this man, formed on the noblest and largest type, found room in Christ alone for the fullest development and exercise of his powers. Is it not plain that if we neglect the connection with Christ which Paul found so fruitful, we are doing ourselves the greatest injustice and preferring a narrow prison-house to liberty and life?

## **THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING**

"For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath

chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." – 1 Cor. i. 17-ii. 5.

## IV

### ***THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING***

In the preceding section of this Epistle Paul introduced the subject which was prominent in his thoughts as he wrote: the divided state of the Corinthian Church. He adjured the rival parties by the name of Christ to hold together, to discard party names and combine in one confession. He reminded them that Christ is indivisible, and that the Church which is founded on Christ must also be one. He shows them how impossible it is for any one but Christ to be the Church's foundation, and thanks God that he had given no pretext to any one to suppose that he had sought to found a party. Had he even baptized the converts to Christianity, there might have been persons foolish enough to whisper that he had baptized in his own name and had intended to found a Pauline, not a Christian, community. But providentially he had baptized very few, and had confined himself to preaching the Gospel, which he considered to be the proper work to which Christ had "*sent*" him; that is to say, for which he held an Apostle's commission and authority. But as he thus repudiates the idea that he had given any countenance to the founding of a Pauline party, it occurs to him that some may say, Yes, it is true enough, he did not baptize; but his preaching may more effectually have won partisans than even baptizing them into his own name could have done. And so Paul goes on to show that his preaching was not that of a demagogue or party-leader, but was a bare statement of fact, garnished and set off by absolutely nothing which could divert attention from the fact either to the speaker or to his style. Hence this digression on the foolishness of preaching.

In this section of the Epistle then it is Paul's purpose to explain to the Corinthians (1) the style of preaching he had adopted while with them and (2) why he had adopted this style.

I. His time in Corinth, he assures them, had been spent, not in propagating a philosophy or system of truth peculiar to himself, and which might have been identified with his name, but in presenting the Cross of Christ and making the plainest statements of fact regarding Christ's death. In approaching the Corinthians, Paul had necessarily weighed in his own mind the comparative merits of various modes of presenting the Gospel. In common with all men who are about to address an audience, he took into consideration the aptitudes, peculiarities, and expectations of his audience, that he might so frame his arguments, statements, and appeals as to be most likely to carry his point. The Corinthians, as Paul well knew, were especially open to the attractions of rhetoric and philosophical discussion. A new philosophy clothed in elegant language was likely to secure a number of disciples. And it was quite in Paul's power to present the Gospel as a philosophy. He might have spoken to the Corinthians in large and impressive language of the destiny of man, of the unity of the race, and of the ideal man in Christ. He might have based all he had to teach them on some of the accepted dicta or theories of their own philosophers. He might have propounded some new arguments for immortality or the existence of a personal God, and have shown how congruous the Gospel is to these great truths. He might, like some subsequent teachers, have emphasized some particular aspect of Divine truth, and have so identified his teaching with this one side of Christianity as to found a school or sect known by his name. But he deliberately rejected this method of introducing the Gospel, and "*determined not to know anything among them save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*" He stripped his mind bare, as it were, of all his knowledge and thinking, and came among them as an ignorant man who had only facts to tell.

Paul then in this instance deliberately trusted to the bare statement of facts, and not to any theory about these facts. This is a most important distinction, and to be kept in view by all preachers, whether they feel called by their circumstances to adopt Paul's method or not. In preaching to audiences with whom the facts are familiar, it is perfectly justifiable to draw inferences from them and to theorize about them for the instruction and edification of Christian people, Paul himself spoke "*wisdom among*

them that were perfect." But what is to be noted is that for doing the work proper to the Gospel, for making men Christians, it is not theory or explanation, but fact, that is effective. It is the presentation of Christ as He is presented in the written Gospels, the narrative of His life and death without note or comment, theory or inference, argument or appeal, which stands in the first rank of efficiency as a means of evangelizing the world. Paul, ever moderate, does not denounce other methods of presenting the Gospel as illegitimate; but in his circumstances the bare presentation of fact seemed the only wise method.

No doubt we may unduly press Paul's words; and probably we should do so if we gathered that he merely told his hearers how Christ had lived and died and gave them no inkling of the significance of His death. Still the least we can gather from his words is that he trusted more to facts than to any explanation of the facts, more to narration than to inference and theory. Certainly the neglect of this distinction renders a great proportion of modern preaching ineffective and futile. Preachers occupy their time in explaining how the Cross of Christ ought to influence men, whereas they ought to occupy their time in so presenting the Cross of Christ that it does influence men. They give laboured explanations of faith and elaborate instructions regarding the method and results of believing, while they should be exhibiting Christ so that faith is instinctively aroused. The actor on the stage does not instruct his audience how they should be affected by the play; he so presents to them this or that scene that they instinctively smile or find their eyes fill. Those onlookers at the Crucifixion who beat their breasts and returned to their homes with awe and remorse were not told that they should feel compunction; it was enough that they saw the Crucified. So it is always; it is the direct vision of the Cross, and not anything which is said about it, which is most effective in producing penitence and faith. And it is the business of the preacher to set Christ and Him crucified clear before the eyes of men; this being done, there will be little need of explanations of faith or inculcation of penitence. Make men see Christ, set the Crucified clear before them, and you need not tell them to repent and believe; if that sight does not make them repent, no telling of yours will make them.

The very fact that it was a Person, not a system of philosophy, that Paul proclaimed was sufficient proof that he was not anxious to become the founder of a school or the head of a party. It was to another Person, not to himself, he directed the attention and faith of his hearers. And that which permanently distinguishes Christianity from all philosophies is that it presents to men, not a system of truth to be understood, but a Person to be relied upon. Christianity is not the bringing of new truth to us so much as the bringing of a new Person to us. The manifestation of God in Christ is in harmony with all truth; but we are not required to perceive and understand that harmony, but to believe in Christ. Christianity is for all men, and not for the select, highly educated few; and it depends therefore, not on exceptional ability to see truth, but on the universal human emotions of love and trust.

II. Paul justifies his rejection of philosophy or "wisdom" and his adoption of the simpler but more difficult method of stating fact on three grounds. The first is that God's method had changed. For a time God had allowed the Greeks to seek Him by their own wisdom; now He presents Himself to them in the foolishness of the Cross (vers. 17-25). The second ground is that the wise do not universally respond to the preaching of the Cross, a fact which shows that it is not wisdom that preaching appeals to (vers. 26-31). And his third ground is that he feared lest, if he used "wisdom" in presenting the Gospel, his hearers might be only superficially attracted by his persuasiveness and not profoundly moved by the intrinsic power of the Cross (ii. 1-5).

1. His first reason is that God had changed His method. "After that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Even the wisest of the Greeks had attained only to inadequate and indefinite views of God. Admirable and pathetic are the searchings of the noble intellects that stand in the front rank of Greek philosophy; and some of their discoveries regarding God and His ways are full of instruction. But these thoughts, cherished by a few wise and devout men, never penetrated to the people, and by their

vagueness and uncertainty were incapacitated from deeply influencing any one. To pass even from Plato to the Gospel of John is really to pass from darkness to light. Plato philosophizes, and a few souls seem for a moment to see things more clearly; Peter preaches, and three thousand souls spring to life. If God was to be known by men generally, it was not through the influence of philosophy. Already philosophy had done its utmost; and so far as any popular and sanctifying knowledge of God went, philosophy might as well never have been. "The world by wisdom knew not God." No safer assertion regarding the ancient world can be made.

That which, in point of fact, has made God known is the Cross of Christ. No doubt it must have seemed foolishness and mere lunacy to summon the seeker after God away from the high and elevating speculations of Plato on the good and the eternal and to point him to the Crucified, to a human form gibbeted on a malefactor's cross, to a man that had been hanged. None knew better than Paul the infamy attaching to that cursed death, and none could more distinctly measure the surprise and stupefaction with which the Greek mind would hear the announcement that it was there God was to be seen and known. Paul understood the offence of the Cross, but he knew also its power. "The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block and unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

As proof that God was in their midst and as a revelation of God's nature, the Jews required a sign, a demonstration of physical power. It was one of Christ's temptations to leap from a pinnacle of the Temple, for thus He would have won acceptance as the Christ. The people never ceased to clamour for a sign. They wished Him to bid a mountain be removed and cast into the sea; they wished Him to bid the sun stand still or Jordan retire to its source. They wished Him to make some demonstration of superhuman power, and so put it beyond a doubt that God was present. Even at the last it would have satisfied them had He bid the nails drop out and had He stepped down from the Cross among them. They could not understand that to remain on the Cross was the true proof of Divinity. The Cross seemed to them a confession of weakness. They sought a demonstration that the power of God was in Christ, and they were pointed to the Cross. But to them the Cross was a stumbling-block they could not get over. And yet in it was the whole power of God for the salvation of the world. All the power that dwells in God to draw men out of sin to holiness and to Himself was actually in the Cross. For the power of God that is required to draw men to Himself is not power to alter the course of rivers or change the site of mountains, but power to sympathize, to make men's sorrows His own, to sacrifice self, to give all for the needs of His creatures. To them that believe in the God there revealed, the Cross is the power of God. It is this love of God that overpowers them and makes it impossible for them to resist Him. To a God who makes Himself known to them in self-sacrifice they quickly and delightedly yield themselves.

2. As a second ground on which to rest the justification of his method of preaching Paul appeals to the constituent elements of which the Church of Corinth was actually composed. It is plain, he says, that it is not by human wisdom, nor by power, nor by anything generally esteemed among men that you hold your place in the Church. The fact is that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." If human wisdom or power held the gates of the kingdom, you yourselves would not be in it. To be esteemed, and influential, and wise is no passport to this new kingdom. It is not men who by their wisdom find out God and by their nobility of character commend themselves to Him; but it is God who chooses and calls men, and the very absence of wisdom and possessions makes men readier to listen to His call. "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things which are; that no flesh should glory in His presence." It is all God's doing now; it is "Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus;" it is God that hath chosen you. Human wisdom had its opportunity and accomplished little; God now by the foolishness of the

Cross lifts the despised, the foolish, the weak, to a far higher position than the wise and noble can attain by their might and their wisdom.

Paul thus justifies his method by its results. He uses as his weapon the foolishness of the Cross, and this foolishness of God proves itself wiser than men. It may seem a most unlikely weapon with which to accomplish great things, but it is God who uses it, and that makes the difference. Hence the emphasis throughout this passage on the agency of God. "God hath chosen" you; "Of God are ye in Christ Jesus;" "Of God He is made unto you wisdom." This method used by Paul is God's method and means of working, and therefore it succeeds. But for this reason also all ground of boasting is removed from those who are within the Christian Church. It is not their wisdom or strength, but God's work, which has given them superiority to the wise and noble of the world. "No flesh can glory in God's presence." The wise and mighty of earth cannot glory, for their wisdom and might availed nothing to bring them to God; those who are in Christ Jesus can as little glory, for it is not on account of any wisdom or might of theirs, but because of God's call and energy, they are what they are. They were of no account, poor, insignificant, outcasts, and slaves, friendless while alive and when dead not missed in any household; but God called them and gave them a new and hopeful life in Christ Jesus.

In Paul's day this argument from the general poverty and insignificance of the members of the Christian Church was readily drawn. Things are changed now; and the Church is filled with the wise, the powerful, the noble. But Paul's main proposition remains: whoever is in Christ Jesus is so, not through any wisdom or power of his own, but because God has chosen and called him. And the practical result remains. Let the Christian, while he rejoices in his position, be humble. There is something wrong with the man's Christianity who is no sooner delivered from the mire himself than he despises all who are still entangled. The self-righteous attitude assumed by some Christians, the "Look at me" air they carry with them, their unsympathetic condemnation of unbelievers, the superiority with which they frown upon amusements and gaieties, all seem to indicate that they have forgotten it is by the grace of God they are what they are. The sweetness and humble friendliness of Paul sprang from his constant sense that whatever he was he was by God's grace. He was drawn with compassion towards the most unbelieving because he was ever saying within himself, There, but for the grace of God, goes Paul. The Christian must say to himself, It is not because I am better or wiser than other men that I am a Christian; it is not because I sought God with earnestness, but because He sought me, that I am now His. The hard suspicion and hostility with which many good people view unbelievers and godless livers would thus be softened by a mixture of humble self-knowledge. The unbeliever is no doubt often to be blamed, the selfish pleasure-seeker undoubtedly lays himself open to just condemnation, but not by the man who is conscious that but for God's grace he himself would be unbelieving and sinful.

Lastly, Paul justifies his neglect of wisdom and rhetoric on the ground that had he used "enticing words of man's wisdom" the hearers might have been unduly influenced by the mere guise in which the Gospel was presented and too little influenced by the essence of it. He feared to adorn the simple tale or dress up the bare fact, lest the attention of his audience might be diverted from the substance of his message. He was resolved that their faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God; that is to say, that those who believed should do so, not because they saw in Christianity a philosophy which might compete with current systems, but because in the Cross of Christ they felt the whole redeeming power of God brought to bear on their own soul.

Here again things have changed since Paul's day. The assailants of Christianity have put it on its defence, and its apologists have been compelled to show that it is in harmony with the soundest philosophy. It was inevitable that this should be done. Every philosophy now has to take account of Christianity. It has shown itself to be so true to human nature, and it has shed so much light on the whole system of things and so modified the action of men and the course of civilization, that a place must be found for it in every philosophy. But to accept Christianity because it has been a powerful influence for good in the world, or because it harmonizes with the most approved philosophy, or

because it is friendly to the highest development of intellect, may be legitimate indeed; but Paul considered that the only sound and trustworthy faith was produced by direct personal contact with the Cross. And this remains for ever true.

To approve of Christianity as a system and to adopt it as a faith are two different things. It is quite possible to respect Christianity as conveying to us a large amount of useful truth, while we hold ourselves aloof from the influence of the Cross. We may approve the morality which is involved in the religion of Christ, we may countenance and advocate it because we are persuaded no other force is powerful enough to diffuse a love of law and some power of self-restraint among all classes of society, we may see quite clearly that Christianity is the only religion an educated European can accept, and yet we may never have felt the power of God in the Cross of Christ. If we believe in Christianity because it approves itself to our judgment as the best solution of the problems of life, that is well; but still, if that be all that draws us to Christ, our faith stands in the wisdom of men rather than in the power of God.

In what sense then are we Christians? Have we allowed the Cross of Christ to make its peculiar impression upon us? Have we given it a chance to influence us? Have we in all seriousness of spirit considered what is presented to us in the Cross? Have we honestly laid bare our hearts to the love of Christ? Have we admitted to ourselves that it was for us He died? If so, then we must have felt the power of God in the Cross. We must have found ourselves taken captive by this love of God. God's law we may have found it possible to resist; its threatenings we may have been able to put out of our mind. The natural helps to goodness which God has given us in the family, in the world around us, in the fortunes of life, we may have found too feeble to lift us above temptation and bring us into a really high and pure life. But in the Cross we at length experience what Divine power is; we know the irresistible appeal of Divine self-sacrifice, the overcoming, regenerating pathos of the Divine desire to save us from sin and destruction, the upholding and quickening energy that flows into our being from the Divine sympathy and hopefulness in our behalf. The Cross is the actual point of contact between God and man. It is the point at which the fulness of Divine energy is actually brought to bear upon us men. To receive the whole benefit and blessing that God can now give us we need only be in true contact with the Cross: through it we become direct recipients of the holiness, the love, the power, of God. In it Christ is made to us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. In very truth all that God can do for us to set us free from sin and to restore us to Himself and happiness is done for us in the Cross; and through it we receive all that is needful, all that God's holiness requires, all that His love desires us to possess.

## **DIVINE WISDOM**

"Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth but which the Holy Ghost

teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."

"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; we ye not carnal?" – 1 Cor. ii. 6-iii. 4.

## V ***DIVINE WISDOM***

In the preceding paragraph Paul has explained why he had proclaimed the bare facts regarding Christ and His crucifixion and trusted to the Cross itself to impress the Corinthians and lead them to God, and why he had resisted the temptation to appeal to the Corinthian taste for rhetoric and philosophy by exhibiting Christianity as a philosophy. He believed that where conversion was the object of preaching no method could compare in efficiency with the simple presentation of the Cross. But sometimes he found himself in circumstances in which conversion could not be his object. He was occasionally called, as preachers in our own day are regularly called, to preach to those who were already Christians. And he tells us that in these circumstances, speaking "among the perfect," or in presence of fairly mature Christians, he made no scruple of unfolding the "wisdom" or philosophy of Christ's truth. To expound the deeper truths revealed by Christ was useless or even hurtful to mere "babes" in Christ or to those who as yet were not even born again; but to the adolescent and to those who might lay claim to have attained some firm manhood of Christian character, he was forward to teach all he himself knew. These words, "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect," he makes the text of the following paragraph, in which he proceeds to explain (1) what the wisdom is; (2) how he speaks it; (3) to whom he speaks it.

I. First, the wisdom which he speaks among the perfect, though eminently deserving of the name, is not on a level with human philosophies, nor is it of a similar origin. It is not just one more added to human searches after truth. The princes of this world, its men of light and leading, have had their own theories of God and man, and yet have really "come to nought." The incompetence of the men and theories that actually control human affairs is put beyond a doubt by the crucifixion of Christ. In the person of Christ the glory of God was manifested as a glory in which man was to partake; had there been diffused among men any true perception of the real nature of God, the Crucifixion would have been an impossibility. The fact that God's incarnate glory was crucified is a demonstration of the insufficiency of all previous teaching regarding God. But the wisdom taught by Paul is not just one theory more, devised by the speculative ingenuity of man; it is a disclosure made by God of knowledge unattainable by human endeavour. The three great sources of human knowledge – seeing, hearing, and thought – alike fail here. "Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, it has not entered into the heart of man to conceive," this wisdom. Hitherto it has been a mystery, a thing hidden; now God has Himself revealed it.

What the contents of this wisdom are, we can readily perceive from such specimens of it as Paul gives us in his Epistle to the Ephesians and elsewhere. It is a declaration of the Divine purpose towards man, or of "the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." Paul delighted to expatiate on the far-reaching results of Christ's death, the illustrations it gives of the nature of God and of righteousness, its place as the grand moral centre, holding together and reconciling all things. He delights to show the superiority of the Gospel to the Law and to build up a philosophy of history which sheds light on the entire plan of God's training of men. The purpose of God and its fulfilment by the death of Christ he is never weary of contemplating, nor of showing how out of destitution, and disease, and war, and ignorance, and moral ruin, and what seemed a mere wreck of a world there were to be brought by this one healing element the restoration of man to God and to one another, fellowship with God and peace on earth, in short a kingdom of God among men. He clearly saw how through all that had previously happened on earth and through all that men had thought preparation had been made for the fulfilment of this gracious purpose of God. These were "the deep things of God" which caused him to see how different was the wisdom of God from the wisdom of men.

This "wisdom" which Paul taught has had a larger and more influential place in men's minds than any other system of human thought. Christendom has seen Christ through Paul's eyes. He interpreted Christianity to the world, and made men aware of what had been and was in their midst. Men of the largest faculty, such as Augustine and Luther, have been unable to find a religion in Christ until they entered His school by Paul's door. Stumbling at one or two Jewish peculiarities which attach to Paul's theology, some modern critics assure us that, "after having been for three hundred years" – and they might have said for fifteen hundred years – "the Christian doctor *par excellence*, Paul is now coming to an end of his reign." Matthew Arnold, with truer discernment, if not on sounder grounds, predicts that "the doctrine of Paul will arise out of the tomb where for centuries it has lain buried. It will edify the Church of the future. It will have the consent of happier generations, the applause of less superstitious ages. All will be too little to pay half the debt which the Church of God owes to this 'least of the Apostles, who was not fit to be called an Apostle, because he persecuted the Church of God.'"

We may find in Paul's writings arguments which, however convincing to the Jew, are not convincing to us; we may prefer his experimental and ethical to his doctrinal teaching; some estimable people can only accept him when they have purged him of his Calvinism; others shut their eyes to this or that which seems to them a blot in his writings; but the fact remains that it is to this man we owe our Christianity. It was he who disengaged from the dying body of Judaism the new-born religion and held it aloft in the eye of the world as the true heir to universal empire. It was he whose piercing intellect and keen moral discernment penetrated to the very heart of this new thing, and saw in it a force to conquer the world and to rid men of all bondage and evil of every kind. It was he who applied to the whole range of human life and duty the inexhaustible ethical force which lay in Christ, and thus lifted at one effort the heathen world to a new level of morality. He was the first to show the superiority of love to law, and to point out how God trusted to love, and to summon men to meet the trust God thus reposed in them. We cannot measure Paul's greatness, because the light he has himself shed has made it impossible for us to put ourselves back in imagination into the darkness through which he had to find his way. We can but dimly measure the strength that was required to grasp as he grasped the significance of God's manifestation in the flesh.

Paul then used two methods of teaching. In addressing those who had yet to be won to Christ, he used the foolishness of preaching, and presented to them the Cross of Christ. In addressing those who had already owned the power of the Cross and made some growth in Christian knowledge and character, he enlarged upon the significance of the Cross and the light it threw on all moral relations, on God and on man. And even in this department of his work he disclaims any desire to propagate a philosophy of his own. The system of truth he proclaims to the Christian people is not of his own devising. It is not in virtue of his own speculative ability he has discovered it. It is not one of the wisdoms of this world, having its origin in the brain of an ingenious theorist. On the contrary, it has its origin in God, and partakes therefore of the truth and stability attaching to the thoughts of God.

II. But if it be undiscoverable by man, how does Paul come to know it? To the Corinthian intelligence there seemed but these three ways of learning anything: seeing, hearing, or thinking; and if God's wisdom was attainable by none of these, how was it reached? Paul proceeds to show how he was enabled to "speak" this wisdom. He does this in vers. 10-13, in which his chief affirmations are that the Spirit of God alone knows the mind of God, that this Spirit has been given to him to reveal to him God's mind and to enable him to divulge that mind to others in suitable words.

1. The Spirit of God alone knows the mind of God and searches its deep things, just as none but the spirit of man which is in him knows the things of man. "There is in every man a life hidden from all eyes, a world of impressions, anxieties, aspirations, and struggles, of which he alone, in so far as he is a spirit – that is to say, a conscious and personal being – gives account to himself. This

inner world is unknown to others, except in so far as he reveals it to them by speech."<sup>3</sup> And if we are baffled often and deceived regarding human character and find ourselves unable to penetrate to the "deep things" of man, to his inmost thoughts and motives, much more is it true that "the deep things" of God are wholly beyond our ken and are only known by the Spirit of God which is in Him. A vague and uncertain guess, possibly not altogether wrong, probably altogether wrong, is all we can attain to.

And still more certainly true is this of God's *purposes*. Even though you flatter yourself you know a man's nature, you cannot certainly predict his intentions. You cannot anticipate the thoughts of an able man whom you see designing a machine, or planning a building, or conceiving a literary work; you cannot say in what form a vindictive man will wreak his vengeance; nor can you penetrate through the abstracted look of the charitable and read the precise form his bounty will take. Every great work even of man comes upon us by surprise; the various inventions that facilitate business, the new poems, the new books, the new works of art, have never been conceived before. They were hidden mysteries until the originating mind disclosed them. And much more were God's intentions and His method of accomplishing inconceivable by any but Himself. What God's purpose was in creating man, what He designed to accomplish through the death of Christ, what was to be the outcome of all human life, and temptation, and struggle – these things were God's secret, known only to the Spirit of God that was in Him.

2. This Spirit, Paul declares, was given to him, and revealed to him God's purposes, "the things which are freely given to us of God." He had received "not the spirit of the world," which would have enabled him only to theorize, and speculate, and create another "wisdom of this world;" but he had received "the Spirit which is of God," and this Spirit had revealed to him "the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

We may think of revelation either as the act of God or as it is received by man. God reveals Himself in all He does, as man discloses his character in all he does. With God's first act therefore in the remotest past revelation began. As yet there was none to receive the knowledge of God, but God showed His nature and His purpose as soon as He began to do anything. And this revelation of Himself has continued ever since. In the world around us and the earth on which we live God reveals Himself; "the things which are made," as Paul says, "give us clearly to see and understand the invisible things of God, His unseen nature, from the creation of the world." Still more fully is God's nature revealed in man: in conscience, distinguishing between right and wrong; in the spirit craving fellowship with the Eternal. In the history of nations, and especially in the history of that nation which founded itself upon its idea of God, He revealed Himself. By guiding it, by delivering it from Egypt, by punishing it, God made Himself known to Israel. And at length in Jesus Christ God gave the fullest possible manifestation of Himself. The veil was entirely lifted, and God came as much as possible into free intercourse with His creatures. He put Himself within reach of our knowledge.

But it was not enough that God be revealed objectively in Christ; there must also be a subjective revelation within the soul of the beholder. It was not enough that God be manifested in the flesh and men be allowed to draw such inferences as they could from that manifestation; but, in addition to this, God gave His Spirit to Paul and others that they might see the full significance of that manifestation. It was quite possible for men to be witnesses of the objective revelation without understanding it. The open eye is needed as well as outward light. And Paul everywhere insists upon this: that he had received his knowledge of Divine truth *by revelation*, not by the mere exercise of his own unaided thought, but by a spiritual enlightenment through the gift of God's Spirit.

The presence of God's Spirit in any man can of course only be verified by the results. God's Spirit working in and by means of man's nature cannot be known in separation from the man's spirit and the work done in that spirit. This inward revelation which Paul refers to is accomplished by the action of the Divine Spirit on the human faculties, quickening and elevating these faculties. The

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<sup>3</sup> Godet.

revelation or new knowledge acquired by Paul was given by God, but at the same time was acquired by Paul's own faculties, so that it remained with him always, just as the knowledge we naturally acquire remains with us and can be freely used by us. An inward revelation can come to a man only in the form of impressions, convictions, thoughts arising in his own mind. Paul knew that his knowledge was a revelation of God, not by the suddenness with which it was imparted, not by supernatural appearances accompanying it, not by any sense or consciousness of another Spirit working with his own, but by the results. It is always the substance or contents of any revelation which proves its origin. Paul knew he had the mind of Christ because he found that he could understand Christ's words and work, could perfectly sympathize with His aims and look at things from Christ's point of view.

In their humility, many persons shrink from making this affirmation here made by Paul; they cannot ever unhesitatingly affirm that the Spirit of God is given them or that they have the mind of Christ. Such persons should recognise that it was the very humility of Paul which enabled him so confidently to affirm these things of himself. He knew that the knowledge of Christ's purposes he had and the sympathy with them were the evidence of God's Spirit working in him. He knew that without God's Spirit he himself could never have had these thoughts. And it is when we recognise our own insufficiency most that we are readiest to confess the presence of God's Spirit.

3. But Paul makes a further affirmation. Not only is the knowledge he has of Divine things a revelation made by God's Spirit to him, but the words in which he declares this revelation to others are taught him by the same Spirit: "which things we also speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." The meaning of these last words is doubtful. They either mean "fitting spiritual words to spiritual truths," or "applying spiritual truths to spiritual people." The sense of the passage is not materially altered whichever meaning is adopted. Paul distinctly affirms that as his knowledge is gained by God's revealing it to him, so his utterance of this knowledge is by the inspiration of God. The spirit of the world produces its philosophies and clothes them in appropriate language. The philosophies with which the Corinthians were familiar taught how the world was made and what man's nature is, and they did so in language full of technicalities and adorned with rhetorical devices. Paul disclaimed this; both his knowledge and the form in which he taught it were dictated, not by the spirit of this world, but by the Spirit of God. The same truths which Paul declared might have been declared in better Greek than he used, and they might have been embellished with illustrative matter and references to their own authors. This style of presenting Divine truth may have been urged upon Paul by some of his Corinthian hearers as far more likely to find entrance into the Greek mind. But Paul refused to allow his style to be formed by human wisdom and the literary methods of secular authors, and thought it more suitable to proclaim spiritual truth in spiritual language and in words which were taught him by the Holy Ghost.

This statement of Paul may be construed into a guarantee of the general accuracy of his teaching; but it was not intended to be that. Paul did not express himself in this way in order to convince men of his accuracy, still less to convince them that every word he uttered was infallibly correct; what he intended was to justify his use of a certain *kind* of language and a certain *style* of teaching. The spirit of this world adopts one method of insinuating knowledge into the mind; the Spirit of God uses another method. It is the latter Paul adopts. That is what he means to say, and it is obvious that from this statement of his we can gather nothing regarding verbal inspiration or the infallibility of every word he spoke.

It might indeed seem a very simple and sound argument were we to say that Paul affirms that the words in which he embodies his teaching are taught him by the Holy Ghost, and that therefore there can be no error in them. But to interpret the words of any writer with no regard to his intention in writing them is voluntarily to blind ourselves to their true meaning. And Paul's intention in this passage is to contrast two methods of teaching, two styles of language, the worldly or secular and the spiritual, and to affirm that the style he adopted was that which the Holy Ghost taught him. An artist

whose work was criticised might defend himself by saying, "I have been trained in the Impressionist school," or "I use the principles taught me by Ruskin," or "I am a pupil of this or the other great teacher;" but these replies, while quite relevant as a defence and explanation of the particular style of painting he has adopted, are not intended to identify the work of the scholar with that of the master, or to insinuate that the master is responsible for all the pupil does. Similarly Paul's reply is relevant as an explanation of his reason for refusing to use the methods of professional rhetoricians in teaching his spiritual truths. "Spiritual modes of presenting truth and an avoidance of rhetorical artifice and embellishment accord better with what I have to say." Whoever gathers from this that every individual word Paul spoke or wrote is absolutely the best does so at his own risk and without Paul's authority. Certainly it was not Paul's intention to make any such statement. And it is quite as dangerous to put too much into Paul's words as to put too little.

III. Having shown that the wisdom he teaches is spiritual, and that his method of teaching it is spiritual, he proceeds finally to show that it can be taught only to spiritual persons. "The spiritual man judgeth all things;" he can discern whether he is "among the perfect" or among the carnal, whether he may speak wisdom or must confine himself to elementary truth. But, on the other hand, he himself cannot be judged by the carnal man. It is in vain that rudimentary believers find fault with Paul's method of teaching; they cannot judge him, because they cannot understand the mind of the Lord which guides him. It would have served no purpose to teach spiritual wisdom in Corinth, for the members of that Church were as yet only babes in Christ, carnal, and not spiritual. Their carnality was proved by their factiousness. They were still governed by the passions which rule the natural man. And therefore Paul fed them with milk, and not with strong meat; with the simple and affecting Gospel of the Cross, and not with those high and far-reaching deductions from it which he divulged among prepared and sympathetic spirits.

In the distinctions of men into natural, carnal, and spiritual Paul here shows how untrammelled he was by theological technicalities, and how straight he looked at facts. He does not divide men summarily into believers and unbelievers, classing all believers as spiritual, all unbelievers as carnal. He does not unchurch all who are not spiritual. He may be disappointed that certain members of the Church are carnal and are very slow in growing up to the maturity of Christian manhood, but he does not deny such carnal persons a place in the Church. He gives them time. He does not flatter them or deceive them as to their condition. He neither counts them as perfect nor repudiates them as unregenerate. He allows they are born again; but as the babe is apparently a mere animal, exhibiting no qualities of mind or heart, but only animal instincts, and yet by care and suitable nourishment develops into adult man, so the Christian babe may as yet be carnal, with very little to differentiate him from the natural man, yet the germ of the spiritual Christian may be there, and with care and suitable nourishment will grow.

The confidence which Paul here expresses regarding his superiority to the judgment of carnal men is a superiority inseparable from knowledge in any department. Truth carries with it always a self-evidencing power, and whoever attains a clear perception of truth in any branch of knowledge is aware that it is the truth he has attained. When the mind has been long puzzling over a difficulty and at last sees the solution, it is as if the sun had risen. The mind is at once convinced.

No one had ever greater right than Paul to say, "I have the mind of Christ." Every day of his life said the same thing. He at once entered into Christ's mind and more than any other man carried it out. It was by his moral sympathy with Christ's aims that he entered so completely into the knowledge of His person and work. He lived his way into the truth. And all our best knowledge is reached in the same way. The truths we see most clearly and have deepest assurance of are those which our own experience has taught us. Spiritual truth is of a kind which only spiritual men can understand.

Spiritual men are those who can say, with Paul, "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." What men's eyes need especially to be opened to is the bounty of God and the consequent wealth and

hopefulness of human life. Paul's wondering delight in God's grace and loving adaptation of Himself to human needs continually finds utterance in his writings. His own sense of unworthiness magnified the forgiving mercy of God. He rejoiced in a Divine love which was passing knowledge, but which he knew could be relied upon to the utmost. The vision of this love opened to his hope a vista of happiness. There is a natural joy in living that all men can understand. This life in many ways appeals to our thirst for happiness, and often it seems as if we needed nothing more. But, in one way or other, most of us learn that what is naturally presented to us in this world is not enough, indeed only brings in the long run anxiety and grief. And then it is that, by God's grace, men come to find that this life is but a small lagoon leading to, and fed by, the boundless ocean of God's love beyond. They learn that there is a hope that cannot be blighted, a joy that is uninterrupted, a fulness of life that meets and satisfies every instinct, and affection, and purpose. They begin to see the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him, the things that are freely given to us of God – "freely given," given without desert of ours, given to make us happy, given by a love that must find expression.

But to know and appreciate the things which are freely given to us of God a man must have the Spirit of God. For God's gifts are spiritual; they attach to character, to what is eternally ours. They cannot be received by those who refuse the severity of God's training and are not alive to the reality of spiritual growth, of passing from a carnal to a spiritual manhood. The path to these eternal, all-satisfying joys may be hard; Christ's path was not easy, and they who follow Him must in one form or other have their faith in the unseen tested. They must really, and not only in word, pass from dependence on this present world to dependence on God; they must somehow come to believe that underneath and in all we here see and experience lies God's unalterable, unmingled love, that ultimately it is this they have to do with, this that explains all.

How soon do men think they have exhausted the one inexhaustible, the love and resources of God; how quickly do men weary of life, and think they have seen all and known all; how ready are men to conclude that for them existence is a failure and can yield no perfect joy, while as yet they know as little of the things God has prepared for them that love Him as the new-born babe knows of the life and experiences that lie before it. You have but touched the hem of His garment; what must it be to be clasped to His heart? Happy they to whom the darkness of this world reveals the boundless distances of the starry heaven, and who find that the blows which have shattered their earthly happiness have merely broken the shell which confined their true life and have given them entrance into a world infinite and eternal.

## **GOD'S HUSBANDRY AND BUILDING**

"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but

he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are your's: whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are your's; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." – 1 Cor. iii. 5-23.

## VI

### ***GOD'S HUSBANDRY AND BUILDING***

Paul, having abundantly justified his method of preaching to the Corinthians, and having shown why he contented himself with the simple presentation of the Cross, resumes his direct rebuke of their party spirit. He has told them that they were as yet unfit to hear the "wisdom" which he taught in some Churches, and the very proof of their immaturity is to be found in their partisanship. "While one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?" The teachers by whose names they were proud to be known were not founders of schools nor heads of parties, who sought recognition and supremacy; they were "ministers," servants who were used by a common Lord to rouse faith, not in themselves, but in Him. Each had his own gifts and his own task. "I have planted." To me it was given to found the Church at Corinth. Apollos came after me, and helped my plant to grow. But it was God Himself who gave the vital influence requisite to make our work efficacious. Apollos and I are but one instrument in God's hand, as the man who sets the sails and he who holds the helm are one instrument used by the master of the ship, or as the mason who hews and the builder who sets the stones in their places are one instrument for the carrying out of the masterbuilder's design. "We are fellow-labourers used by God; ye are *God's* husbandry, *God's* building."

Throughout this paragraph it is this thought that Paul dwells upon: that the Church is originated and maintained, not by men, but by God. Teachers are but God's instruments; and yet, being human instruments, they have each his own responsibility, as each has his own part of the one work.

From this truth that God alone is the Giver of spiritual life and that the Church is His building several inferences may be drawn.

1. Our praise for any good we have received of a spiritual kind should be given, not solely to men, but mainly to God. The Corinthians were conscious that in receiving Christianity they had received a very great boon. They felt that gratitude was due somewhere. The new thoughts they had of God, the consciousness of Christ's eternal love, the hope of immortality, the sustaining influence of the friendship of Christ, the new world they seemed to live in – all this made them think of those who had brought them this new happiness. But Paul was afraid lest their acknowledgment of himself and Apollos should eclipse their gratitude to God. People sometimes congratulate themselves on having adopted a good style of religion, not too sentimental, not sensational and spasmodic, not childishly external, not coldly doctrinal; they are thankful they lit upon the books they read at a critical time of their spiritual and mental growth; they can clearly trace to certain persons an influence which they know strengthened their character; and they think with gratitude and sometimes with excessive admiration of such books and persons. Paul would say to them, It is not culpable to think with gratitude of those who have been instrumental in furthering your knowledge of the truth or your Christian life; but always remember that you are God's husbandry and God's building, and that it is to Him all your praise must ultimately go.

2. It is to God we must look for all further growth. We must use the best books; we must put ourselves under influences which we know are good for us, whatever they are for others; we must conscientiously employ such means of grace as our circumstances permit; but, above all, we must ask God to give the increase. No doubt the use of the means God uses to increase our life is a silent but constant prayer; still we are not mere trees planted to wait for such influences as come to us, but have wills to choose the life these influences bring and to open our being to the living God who imparts Himself to us in and through them.

3. If we are God's husbandry and building, let us reverence God's work in ourselves. It may seem a very rickety and insecure structure that is rising within us, a very sickly and unpromising

plant; and we are tempted to mock the beginnings of good in ourselves and be disappointed at the slow progress the new man makes in us. Vexed at our small attainment, at the poor show among Christians our character makes, at the stunted appearance the plant of grace in us presents, we are tempted to trample it once for all out of sight. Grace sometimes seems to do so little for us in emergencies, and the transformation of our character seems so unutterably slow and shallow, that we are disposed to think the radical change we need can never be accomplished. But different thoughts possess us when we remember that this transformation of character is not a thing to be accomplished only by ourselves through a judicious choice and a persevering use of fit means, but is God's work. There may be little appearance or promise of good in you; but underneath the little there lies what is infinitely great, even the purpose and love of God Himself. "Ye are God's husbandry;" therefore hope becomes you. The deliverance of the human soul from evil, its redemption to purity and nobility – this is what engages all God's care and energy.

4. For the same reason we must hope for others as for ourselves. It is the foundation of all hope to know that God has always been inclining men to righteousness and will always do so. So often we look sadly at the godlessness, and frivolity, and deep degradation and misery that abound, and feel as if the burden of lifting men to a higher condition lay all upon us; the ceaseless flow of human life into and out of the world, the hopeless conditions in which many are born, the frightful influences to which they are exposed, the extreme difficulty of winning even one man to good, the possibility that no more may be won and that the Christian stock may die out – these considerations oppress the spirit, and cause men to despair of ever seeing a kingdom of God on earth. But Paul could never despair, because he was at all times convinced that the whole energy that ceaselessly goes forth from God goes forth to accomplish good, and nothing but good, and that among the good ends God is accomplishing there is nothing for which He has sacrificed so much and at which He so determinedly aims as the restoration of men to purity, love, and goodness.

5. But the chief inference Paul draws from the truth that the Church is God's building is the grave responsibility of those who labour for God in this work. As for Paul's own part in the work, the laying of the foundation, he says that was comparatively easy. There was no chance of his making a mistake there. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Any teacher who professes to lay another foundation thereby gives up his claim to be a Christian teacher. If any one proceeds to lay another foundation than Christ, it is not a Christian Church he is meaning to build. He who does not proceed upon the facts of Christ's life and death, he whose instruction does not presuppose Christ as its foundation, may be useful for some purposes of life, but not as a builder of the Christian temple. He who teaches morality without ever hinting that apart from Christ it cannot be attained in its highest form may have his use, but not as a Christian teacher. He who uses the Christian pulpit for the propagation of political or socialist ideas may be a sound and useful teacher; but his proper place is the platform or the House of Commons or some such institution, and not the Christian Church. And the question at present, says Paul, is not what other institutions you may profitably found in the world, but how this institution of the Church, already founded, is to be completed. Other *foundation* no Christian teacher is proposing to lay; but on this foundation very various and questionable material is being built, in some instances gold, silver, and stones of value, in others wood, hay, stubble.

When Corinth rose from its ruins, it was no uncommon sight to see a miserable hovel reared against the marble wall of a temple or the splendid portico of some deserted palace rendered habitable by a patchwork of mud and straw. What a recent visitor saw at Luxor may be accepted as to some extent true of Corinth: "Mud hovels, mud pigeon-towers, mud yards, and a mud mosque cluster like wasps' nests in and about the ruins. Architraves sculptured with royal titles support the roofs of squalid cabins. Stately capitals peep out from the midst of sheds in which buffaloes, camels, donkeys, dogs, and human beings herd together in unsavoury fellowship." So in Corinth the huge slabs of costly and carefully chiselled stone lay stable as the rock on which they rested, but now the glory of such

foundations was dishonoured by squalid superstructures. And the picture in Paul's mind's eye of the Corinthian Church vividly suggested what he had seen while walking among those heterogeneous buildings. He sees the Church rising with a strange mixture of design and material. The foundation, he knows, is the same; but on the solid marble is reared a crazy structure of second-hand and ill-adapted material, here a wall propped up with rotten planking, there a hole stopped with straw, on one side a richly decorated gateway, with gold and silver profusely wrought into its design, on the other side a clay partition or loose boarding. It grieves him to see the incongruous structure. He sees the teachers bringing, with great appearance of diligence, the merest rubbish, wood, hay, stubble, apparently unconscious of the incongruity of their material with the foundation they build upon. He sees them taken with every passing fancy – the lifeless stubble that has lost its living seed of truth, the mud of the common highway, the readiest thoughts that come to hand – and setting these in the temple wall.

What would Paul say did he now see the super-structure which eighteen hundred years have raised on the one foundation? Is any more heterogeneous structure anywhere to be seen than the Church of Christ? How obviously unworthy of the foundation is much that has been built upon it; how many teachers have laboured all their days at erecting what has already been proved a mere house of cards; and how many persons have been built into the living temple who have brought no stability or beauty to the building. How careless often have the builders been, anxious only to have quantity to show, regardless of quality, ambitious to be credited with largely extending the size of the Church apart from any consideration of the worth or worthlessness of the material added. As in any building, so in the Church, additional size is additional danger if the material be not sound.

The soundness of the material which has been built upon the foundation of Christ will, like all things else, be tested. "The day shall declare it;" that light of Christ's presence and dominance over all things, that light which shall penetrate all human things when our true life is entered on —*that* shall declare it. "The fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire." The Corinthians knew what a trial by fire meant. They knew how the flames had travelled over their own city, consuming all that fire could kindle on, and leaving of the slightly built houses nothing but a charred and useless timber here and there, while the massive marbles stood erect among the ruins; and the precious metals, even though molten, were prized by the conqueror. Against the fire no prayer, no appeal, prevailed. Its judgment and decisions were irreversible; wood, hay, stubble, disappeared: only what was solid and valuable remained. By such irreversible judgment are we and our work to be judged. We are to enter into a life in which the nature and character of the work we have done in this world shall bring upon it utter destruction or a rewarding and growing utility. Fire simply burns up all that will burn and leaves what will not. So shall the new life we are to pass into absolutely annihilate what is not in keeping with it, and leave only what is useful and congruous. There is no question here of admitting explanations, of adducing extenuating circumstances, of appealing to compassion, and so forth. It is a judgment, and a judgment of absolute truth, which takes things as they actually are. The work that has been well and wisely done will stand; foolish, vain, and selfish work will go. We are to pass through the fire.

Paul, with his unfailing discernment, accepts it as a very possible contingency that a Christian man may do poor work. In that case, Paul says, the man will be saved as by fire; his work shall be burned, but himself be scatheless. He shall be in the position of a man whose house has been burnt; the man is saved, but his property, all that he has slowly gathered round him and valued as the fruit of his labour, is gone. He may have received no bodily injury, but he is so stripped that he scarcely knows himself, and the whole thought and toil of his life seem to have gone for nothing. So, says Paul, shall this and that man pass into the heavenly state, hearing behind him as he barely enters the crash of all he has been building up as it falls and leaves for the result of a laborious life a ghastly, charred ruin and a cloud of dust. To have been useless, to have advanced Christ's kingdom not at all,

to have spent our life building up a pretentious erection which at last falls about our ears, to come to the end and find that not one solid brick in the whole fabric is of our laying, and that the world would have been quite as well without us – this must be humiliating indeed; but it is a humiliation which all selfish, worldly, and foolishly fussy Christians are preparing for themselves. To many Christians it seems enough that they be doing *something*. If only they are decently active, it concerns them little that their work is really effecting no good, as if they were active rather for the sake of keeping themselves warm in a chilling atmosphere than to accomplish any good purpose. Work done for this world must be such as will stand inspection and actually do the thing required. Christian work should not be less, but more, thorough.

There is a degree of carelessness or malignity sometimes to be found in those who profess to be Christian teachers which Paul does not hesitate unconditionally to doom. "If any man destroy the temple of God, him shall God destroy." A teacher may in various ways incur this doom. He may in guiding some one to Christ fit him obliquely to the foundation, so that firm rest in Christ is never attained; but the man remains like a loose stone in a wall, unsettled himself and unsettling all around him. Any doctrine which turns the grace of God into licence incurs this doom. To lift stones from the mire they have been lying in and fit them into the temple is good and right, but to leave them uncleansed and unpolished is to disfigure the temple. Any teaching that does not recognise in Christianity the means of becoming holy, and encourages men to believe themselves Christians though they neither have nor wish to have the Spirit of Christ, destroys the temple.

But we are responsible as well as our teachers for the appearance we present in God's temple. The stone that is to occupy a permanent place in a building is carefully squared and beaten into its place, and its level adjusted with the utmost nicety. Would it not make a very obvious change in the appearance and in the strength of the Church if every member of it were at pains to set himself absolutely true to Christ? There is no doubt a good deal of anxiety about our relation to Christ, frequent examining and measuring of our actual position; but does not this too often merely reveal that conscience is uneasy? Some persons are prevented from resting satisfactorily on Christ because of some erroneous opinion about faith or about the manner in which the connection is formed, or some pet theory or crotchet has possessed the mind and keeps them unsettled. Some will not rest on Christ until they have such repentance as they judge sufficient; others so rest on Him that they have no repentance. Strange that men will so complicate the simplicity of Christ, who is the hand of our heavenly Father, stretched out to lift us out of our sin and draw us to Himself! If you wish God's love, accept it; if you long for holiness, take Christ as your Friend; if you see no greater joy than to serve in His great cause, do His will and follow Him.

But, alas! with some it is no misunderstanding that prevents a close connection between the soul and Christ, but some worldly purpose or some entangling and deeply cherished sin. The foundation stone is as a polished slab of marble, having its upper surface smooth as a mirror, whereas we are like stones that have been lying on the seashore, encrusted with shells and lichens, drilled with holes, grown all round and round with unsightly inequalities; and if we are to rest with entire stability on the foundation, these excrescences must be removed. Even a small one at one point is enough to prevent close adhesion. One sin consciously retained, one command or expression of Christ's will unresponded to, makes our whole connection with Him unsettled and insecure, our confessions and repentances untrue and hardening, our prayers hesitating and insincere, our love for Christ hollow, our life inconsistent, vacillating, and unprofitable.

And more must be done even after we are securely fitted into our place. Stones often look well enough when first built in, but soon lose their colour; and their surface and fine edges crumble and shale off, so that they need to be constantly looked to. So do the stones in God's temple get tarnished and discoloured by exposure. One sin after another is allowed to stain the conscience; one little corruption after another settles on the character, and eats out its fineness, and when once the fair, clean stone is no longer unsullied, we think it of little consequence to be scrupulous. Then the

weather tells upon us: the ordinary atmosphere of this life, with its constant damp of worldly care and its occasional storms of loss, and disappointment, and social collisions, and domestic embroilment, eats out the heavenly temper from our character, and leaves its edges ragged; and the man becomes soured and irritable, and the surface of him, all that meets the casual eye, is rough and broken.

Above all, do not many Christian persons seem to think it enough to have attained a place in the building, and, after spending a little thought and trouble on entering the Christian life, take no step onwards during the whole remainder of their lives? But it is in God's building as in highly ornamented buildings generally. The stones are not all sculptured before they are fitted into their places; but they are built in rough-hewn, so that the building may proceed: and then at leisure the device proper to each is carved upon it. This is the manner of God's building. Long after a man has been set in the Church of Christ, God hews and carves him to the shape He designs; but we, being not dead, but living, stones, have it in our power to mar the beauty of God's design, and indeed so distort it that the result is a grotesque and hideous monster, belonging to no world, neither of God nor of man. If we let a thousand other influences mould and fashion us, God's design must necessarily be spoiled.

The folly of partisanship and sectarianism is finally exhibited in the words "Let no man glory in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas." The man who held to Paul and would learn nothing from Apollos or Peter was defrauding himself of his rights. It has been the weakness of Christians in all ages, and never more than in our own, to see good in only one aspect of truth and listen to no form of teaching but one. The Broad Churchman despises the traditionalist; the Evangelical gathers up his skirts at the approach of a Broad Churchman. Calvinist and Arminian stand at daggers drawn. Each limits himself to his own fortress, which he thinks he can defend, and starves himself on siege rations while the fields wave white with grain outside. The eye is constructed to sweep round a wide range of vision; but men put on blinkers, and decline even to look at anything which does not lie directly in the line of sight. We know that to confine ourselves to one form of food induces poverty of blood and disease, and yet we fancy a healthy spiritual life can be maintained only by confining ourselves to one form of doctrine and one way of looking at universal truth. To the Evangelical who shrinks with horror from liberal teaching, and to the advanced thinker who turns with contempt from the Evangelical, Paul would say, Ye do yourselves a wrong by listening to one form of the truth only; every teacher who declares what he himself lives on has something to teach you; to despise or neglect any form of Christian teaching is so far to impoverish yourselves. "All things are yours," not this teacher or that, in whom you glory, but all teachers of Christ.

His own expression, "all things are yours," suggests to Paul the whole wealth of the Christian, for whom exist not only all those who have striven to unfold the significance of the Christian revelation, but all things else, whether "the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come." As it is true of all teachers, of however commanding genius, that the Church does not exist for them that they may have a field for their genius, and followers to applaud and represent them, but that they exist for the Church, their genius being used for the advancement of the spiritual life of this and that unknown and hidden soul; so is it true of all things, – of life and all its laws, of death and all it leads to, – that these are ordained of God to minister to the growth of His children. This was the regal attitude which Paul himself assumed and maintained towards all events and the whole world of created things. He was incapable of defeat. The outrages and deaths he endured, he bore as proofs of the truth of his gospel. The storms of ill-will and persecution he everywhere encountered, he knew were only bringing him and his gospel more rapidly to all the world. And when he looked at last on the sword of the Roman executioner, he recognised it with joy as the instrument which by one sharp blow was to burst his fetters and set him free to boundless life and the full knowledge of his Lord. The same inheritance belongs to every one who has faith to take it. "All things are yours." The whole course of this world and all its particular incidents, the complete range of human experience from first to last, including all we shrink from and fear, – all are for the good of Christ's people. What thoughts flash from this man's mind. How his words still entrance and lift and animate the soul. "All things are

ours." The catastrophes of life that seem finally to blot out hope, the wild elemental forces in whose presence frail man is as the moth, the unknown future of the physical world, the certain death that awaits every man and listens to no appeal, all things that naturally discourage and compel us to feel our weakness, – yes, says Paul, all these things are yours, serving your highest good, bringing you on towards your eternal joy, more certainly than the things you select and buy, or win, and cherish as your own. You are free men, supreme over all created things, for "ye are Christ's," you belong to Him who rules all, and loves you as His own; and above Christ and His rule there is no adverse will that can rob you of any good, for as ye are Christ's, cherished by Him, so is Christ God's, and the supreme will that governs all, governs all in the interests of Christ.

## THE MINISTRY

"Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God. And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it? Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace: and labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the earth, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me." – 1 Cor. iv. 1-16.

## VII *THE MINISTRY*

So keenly alive is Paul to the danger and folly of party-spirit in the Church, that he has still one more word of rebuke to utter. He has shown the Corinthians that to give their faith to one teacher, and shut their ears to every other form of truth than that which he delivers, is to impoverish and defraud themselves. All teachers are theirs, and are sent, not to win disciples to themselves, who may spread their fame and reflect credit on their talents, but to serve the people, and be merged in self-obliterating toil. The preachers, Paul tells them, exist for the Church: not the Church for the preachers. The people are the primary consideration, the main end to which the preachers are subordinate. The mistake often made in things civil, that the people exist for the king, not the king for the people, is made also in things ecclesiastical, and has, in some instances, attained such dimensions that the "Church" means the clergy, not the laity, and that when a man enters the ministry he is said to enter the Church, – as if already he were not in it as a layman.

Paul now proceeds to demonstrate the futility of the judgment passed upon their teachers by the Corinthians. Paul and the rest were servants of Christ, stewards sent by Him to dispense to others what he had entrusted to them. The question therefore was, were they faithful, did they dispense what they had received in conformity with Christ's purpose? The question was not, were they eloquent, were they philosophical, were they learned? Criticism no preacher need expect to escape. Sometimes one might suppose sermons were of no other use than to furnish material for a little discussion and pleasant exercise of the critical faculty. Every one considers himself capable of this form of criticism, and once a sermon has been sorted and labelled as of this, that, or the other quality, it is too often put permanently aside. In such criticism, Paul reminds us, it is a great matter to bear in mind that what has no great attraction for us may yet serve some good purpose. The gifts dispensed by Christ are various. The influence of some ministers is most felt in private, while others are shy and stiff, and can only utter themselves freely in the pulpit. In the pulpit again various gifts appear, some having good nerve and a ready and felicitous address which reaches the multitude; while others have more power of thought, and a finer literary gift, or a sympathetic manner of handling peculiarities of spiritual experience. Who shall say which of these styles is most edifying to the Church? And who shall say which teacher is most faithfully serving his Master? Who shall determine whether this preacher or that is the better steward, most truly seeking his Lord's glory, and careless of his own? May it not be expected that when the things at present hidden in darkness, the motives and thoughts of the heart, are brought to light in Christ's judgment, many that are first shall be last, and the last first?

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