

“BAPTIZED INTO ONE BODY.”

I COR. xii.

THE revelation of this great and characteristic truth of Christianity—the effect of the presence of the Holy Spirit—was specially given to the Apostle Paul; for while the mystery of Christ and the church was revealed *to* God's holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit, it was not revealed *by* them all. “Unto me,” says the Apostle Paul, was this mystery revealed (Ep. iii. 3); and to all the church by him (verse 9). Nor do any of the writers of the New Testament but Paul speak of the church as “the body of Christ.” Converted as he was on his way to Damascus by a sight of Jesus as the Lord in glory, he learned by the words he heard from Him—“I am Jesus whom thou persecutest”—that the crucified Nazarene, now exalted to the glory of God, identified Himself with the objects of his unrelenting persecution. The first and the last that had ever been arrested by a revelation of Jesus, which revealed also in principle the union of His church with Him, he was precisely the one suited to unfold and enforce, both practically and by his writings, the heavenly character

of the church of God as Christ's body, and devote himself for God's glory in it. This became his life, and to this God henceforth called him by Jesus Christ our Lord.

And "straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God" (Acts ix. 20), not merely as Messíah, or servant of God on earth. For while Christ is the head of the church as the exalted man, yet He who is the exalted man is the Son. Thus we are led to think of all His glory, human and divine, and delight in it: and while accepting in simplicity the truth of God, the importance of the truth is realised by the soul, and at the same time the heart is purified thereby.

Peter told them (Acts ii. 36) that "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." Now it is evident that, though of capital importance, the Lordship of Jesus (*i.e.*, the assertion of His authority) is the simplest and lowest side of the truth of Christ. It does not bring out His grace nor His infinite glory. It is what He was made, not what He was and is in Himself. Stephen goes farther, and bears witness that He was the Son of man standing at the right hand of God in glory. Paul learns that Christ and the saints he was persecuting are one; and further, straightway preaches that He was the Son of God—a truth of higher moment than any glory He could have, even as exalted in any way whatsoever at the right hand of God. And I am persuaded that all our practical power to walk in the rest of the truth depends on the measure in which the truth of His personal glory is felt and owned by our souls. Just as Christ Himself becomes exalted before us, will everything

concerning Him be brightened and enlarged according to that which we see here. And in nothing will we see the bearing of this more than in our understanding of what the church is, which is the body of Christ, the answer produced on earth by the Holy Spirit to the glory of that exalted man and head at the right hand of God. You cannot separate the two nor understand what the church is, separate from the present glory of Christ as a man exalted now in heaven. By it the world is judged and condemned—its glory put in the shade. It rejected and cast out the Son of God come down in grace to it, and the sentence of God's judgment against it has gone forth, and heaven receives the rejected One. Thereon all was changed, and instead of seeing man turned out of Eden into what became a desert and a godless world, man now in the person of Jesus enters heaven itself, and sits down on the throne of God and glory.

Then, and not before, could there be the formation of a body on the earth; for there must first be an adequate head—one who was man as well as God; and moreover sin must be judged and grace in consequence have its full way; and this we see in the cross. Further, there must be an adequate power to effectuate this in a manner worthy of the way the Son of God had shown Himself. And what power could this be, other than the Holy Ghost Himself come down? And He accordingly does come down. And this is the fruit of His coming: He forms one body on earth—not many bodies. There is no such thought in Scripture. It would be a wrong to Jesus; a wrong to this most blessed way in which God is glorifying His Son by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven.

Now what is specially brought before us in our chapter is, that the Holy Spirit is come down to work on earth in the church, and not merely in the saints individually. There is here below that which God calls His church, the body of Christ, and here identified with Christ; the whole indeed called Christ Himself (verse 12)—so thoroughly do the saints form a part of His glory. And the folly and vanity and working of other evil among the Corinthian saints formed the occasion for the Spirit to instruct us thus largely about this great truth. Nor was it a question of weakness with them. Disorder has nothing to do with weakness, but rather with strong flesh and insubjection to Christ. It was the abuse of power, the ostentatious desire of showing what they possessed—in few words, the severance of the power of the Spirit from the glorifying of the Lord. Disorder was the natural result. How ought we to bless God for the use to which He has turned it in His mercy!

“Now concerning spiritual gifts (rather, things—*i.e.*, manifestations), brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed.” God, we know, made Him a curse on the cross, when He died for our sins; but as no man calls Jesus Himself accursed by the Spirit of God, neither can one say that Jesus is Lord but through the Holy Spirit. Thus there are two powers at issue: one, the spirit of insubjection to Jesus, working in the children of disobedience; the other the Holy Spirit, leading saints to own the Lordship of Jesus. These Corinthians were practically making the Lord's

Supper their own supper, and the assembly of God their own theatre of display; as if the word went out *from* them, instead of coming *to* them, claiming their obedience to God. And it is upon such alone the Lordship of Jesus needs to be pressed. The saint that enjoys Christ needs no such pressure, would have none other lord, and delights in His grace. God deals morally with us, though He would carry our hearts into the engagements of Himself, where all thought of our own ways must be dropped.

Next, "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administration, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." It is evident that these verses are of deep importance, containing the very simplest elements of the character of God's assembly, viewed in its working day by day: yet the church has practically forgotten them.

First, then, there are diversities of gifts; and in what ever assumes to answer to His church on earth, there must be free room for the exercise of these gifts, in the same congregation. Dependence on one or more individuals only, however gifted, in principle denies that "there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit" [not one minister]. Not that there should be the effort to give the semblance of many gifts at work. The church of God is a real body: and we must add that its present state is distressingly anomalous. Seeking appearances, which would always have been unseemly, is now specially to be deprecated. In fact, especially as the assembly now is, weakened by divisions, the fruit of man's ignorance or self-will, there might be few—perhaps none in a particular place, or only one or two might manifest

gifts to edification: elsewhere there might be many. The great point is that the door be open for all He gives. Whatever denies this practically or in principle is not God's church, and I am bound to disown its pretensions. If human rules, different from Scripture, and even opposed, govern, it becomes not a question about the constituents, be they Christians or not, but of that which regulates their action. Who licensed man to meddle, when God made the church for Himself and gave regulations for its guidance? It is not a governmental provision of religion for a nation, nor a society framed to hold and carry out the plans and peculiar views of the best of men. It is the body formed by the Holy Spirit here below for Christ, whom in its first principle it confesses as Lord. But the manner of the practical working is in diversities of gifts, though the same Spirit.

Next, "there are differences of administration, but the same Lord." That is, the Lord employs one for one thing, and another for another. But it is He who acts in this. The Spirit does not here take the place of Lord, nor is it correct to speak of the rule of the Spirit. There is the power and working and sovereignty of the Spirit. But Scripture refers us in subjection to the Lordship of Christ, as servants to do His will, and whatever is of the Spirit in us has this character. Thus the Spirit constitutes one, in relation to the Lord Jesus, a servant, even though one's function may be to rule in the church of God.

Again, "there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." The church is not a place where man has the smallest title, or where there is any room for his will. If God is working there,

it is man's place to retire, that God may really work according to His own will. It is either God's assembly or nothing. Some may think it presumptuous to call themselves God's assembly, who yet would shrink from the necessary alternative of being called "man's assembly." But as it is a delusion of Satan that to know God our Father in Christ is to weaken our obedience; so is it to deny the title of Christ's members, wherever they may be. Why, save on this basis, would you ask them to abandon the ways and systems of man, and urge on them the blessedness of being gathered only to Christ's name on earth, before we go to heaven, as part of that which God has called His church?

How nauseous to sink into a voluntary society—a sect framed and governed according to rules of man's device! It is the duty of every Christian to cleave only to what God has done and revealed, not doubting the power and the willingness of the Spirit to make him faithful. It is no question of forming a new church, still less a make-shift. It is our place to recognise what the Spirit has formed and never abandons. Only two or three may have faith to feel and act (for the ruin is very great); but be they many or few, God's rule and will can never lose their authority over His people by any change of circumstances. Clericalism and religious radicalism are both opposed to Scripture and the action of the Holy Spirit. They are different and opposite forms of man's will. But the church is a divine institution where God must be supreme: and the Holy Spirit alone can make good, according to the written word. If it be "our church," or "your church," God's sovereign authority is so far virtually disowned.

But where two or three are gathered together in the

faith of what Scripture lays down, I am bound to own them as on the true ground of God's church. They may not be "*the** church;" but I do call them, as walking together, His church. They answer in their conduct and position to its nature. The number of those gathered is a subordinate point; nor is it the fact of their being Christians simply, apart from obedience to Scripture. This alone would give them no real claim on God's children outside of them to recognise them corporately, though they would be individually objects of love as Christians. An assembly of saints is so far well; but this does not of itself constitute them the church, but the presence of the Spirit of God who leads them to obey the word of God. This seems wholly forgotten. For as it was with Christ the Son in the days of His flesh, so now the Holy Spirit is not allowed His place, nor has God the freedom of acting in the church according to His own word, I beseech you to consider this matter.

But, further, "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man (not for himself but) to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith," &c. Many of these were for signs to the world, *e.g.*, tongues (compare Acts ii. 11; 1 Cor. xiv. 22). But whatever they were, it is added, "All these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he (*i.e.*, the Holy Spirit, not man) will. For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being

* That is not *the* Church in the sense of completeness to the exclusion of other members of Christ not with them, though *God's* church in the sense of really meeting according to His will.

many, are one body: so also is Christ." And if you have been saved by the Lord Jesus, you have been saved to own His Lordship, and the sovereign action of the Spirit in the saints, in God's assembly here below: and no amount of disorder in the church can absolve you from your responsibility in this matter.

Now this is what the apostle desired for the Corinthians. They had practically got the whole machinery into disorder; but so far from denying them to be the assembly of God, he makes that the very basis of his appeal to their consciences to look to the Lord and call and count upon Him that they might cast out what was offensive to God's glory, if nothing less would remedy the evil. It is not the fact of weakness or the entrance of positive evil that would lead us to separate, but the refusal to deal with the unclean thing—the practical rejection of the Spirit of God, rising up by the word and rebuking the evil. Nor will the plea of maintaining unity avail, where all that makes unity precious (*i.e.*, obedience to Scripture) is gone. We must gird up our loins and be faithful, looking in our weakness to Him whose the church is, and to whom belong all power and might.

But what if subtle evil, and especially against Christ, gain the upper hand in the assembly, and if remedy or judgment be refused, or the claims of God's holiness according to Scripture be considered uncalled-for or presumptuous? Much as it may grieve our hearts and wound our feelings to be forced to such a last alternative, still without hesitation of spirit we must turn our backs on that which could thus basely betray the honour of His name. But we should never so act in an individual case, still less with an assembly,

until we are forced to know the sad and humbling truth that they are faithless to Christ. Haste is the last thing that should characterise the child of God, though, when the truth is patent, we may not close our eyes or decline to act firmly.

Again, "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (*i.e.*, all Christians are members of this body); not one is left out. Not that we lose our individual place as Christians. But as well as this, we have a corporate place as members of the one body, the church, formed by the unfailing presence of the Spirit sent down from heaven. And if this be so, is it not incumbent on us to walk accordingly? Scripture is simple to those who in simplicity and godly sincerity seek to obey it. Were we childlike and subject to it, the Holy Spirit could and would produce but one conviction. The reason why Christians differ so widely is because of so much unjudged flesh and self-will: I say this as much against myself as against anyone who allows the flesh to have its way. But one cannot give up the assurance of the Spirit's presence, or the sufficiency of God's word, because of our own failure: better far to put aside all the rubbish of tradition and unbelief, or whatever, contradicting Scripture, makes it impossible thoroughly and in all things to carry out the word of God in the Spirit.

The rest of the chapter teaches that the body is not one member but many. The variety of the members indicates that all are different and all necessary, though not for the same end, nor as having the same place or function. In the present weakness and dislocated condition, so far as outward manifestation of the church is concerned, one member is to be found here, one there,

scattered and not gathered. Confusion and perplexity is the effect of this. But God is ever faithful, and the Holy Spirit present with us is sufficient for all circumstances. And it comes to be simply a question of our faith in the reality of His presence and power.

In Eph. iv. the body of Christ is again spoken of, but in a strikingly different way, as linked up with its Head in heaven; while in 1 Cor. xii. it is rather the scene of the Holy Spirit's operation on earth. Its relationship in Eph. iv. is viewed as oneness with Christ above, who is therefore the infallible source of supply for all it needs. He gave gifts—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers—for the nourishment of the body, in His personal love and care for it, “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” In 1 Cor. xii. the Spirit works as He will in these various manifestations, given to each in the church as a testimony of the exaltation of Christ and the power of God in the world (1 Cor. xix. 22). But, whether it be in 1 Cor. xii. or Eph. iv., these gifts are exercised in “the unity of the Spirit” as members of one body, and not independently one of another. And this is true even of evangelizing. Thus when Saul and Barnabas (Acts xiii.)* went forth, it was as recommended by the church to the grace of God. So they come back to tell the church what God had wrought (Acts xiv. 26). It was in nowise as having derived their commission from the church, which is not competent to choose or to send forth the Lord's servants. And this is of vast impor-

* The comparison of Acts xiii. 3, 4, is instructive. Verse 3 speaks merely of the *dismissal* of Barnabas and Saul by their brethren; verse 4, of their *mission* by the Holy Spirit.

tance when we consider the present disorderly pretensions of the various sects in Christendom to choose and send forth their own ministers.

Further, in Eph. iv. we are told these gifts are "till" we all come in the unity of the faith to the measure of Christ's fulness. There is no such assurance in speaking of the signs (1 Cor. xii.). But what was necessary for the calling in of fresh souls, and for the edification of those called in, abides for the church of God even to the end. Apostles and prophets are the foundation (Eph. ii. 20); the rest—evangelists, pastors, and teachers—are for the carrying on of the building, while "signs" are no longer needed; though, to vindicate His own power in the face of unbelief, if He chose, the Lord could at any time and in any measure restore them.

May we cherish faith in His word, looking to please Him! Although I have but scantily dipped into this part of the subject, I have at least directed attention by God's grace to that which will not fail those who have faith in Himself.—*Abridged, with permission of the author, from "Kelly's Lectures on the Holy Spirit."*

Price, for gratuitous distribution, direct from Manchester, 2s. 3d.
per 100; or per post, or through any Bookseller, 2s. 9d.

Published at 93, Bloomsbury, Oxford Road, Manchester.
R. L. ALLAN, 15, Paternoster Row, London.

POST-OFFICE ORDERS PAYABLE TO W. B. HORNER, OXFORD ROAD
POST-OFFICE.