

Ephesians - Commentaries by Walter Thomas Prideaux Wolston

The Church: What Is It?, Body of Christ: the United Church, The (4:1-16)

Ephesians 4:1-16

The Assembly viewed as the Body of Christ is presented to us under that figure in four New Testament epistles—Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians; and I want, with the Lord's help, very briefly to indicate to you the salient points that the Spirit of God presents in these epistles, in so speaking of the Church of God.

Get the thought of the Body first of all in your minds. What is the body? My body is any part of me that is not my head. But of course the body would be of no use without the head, and the head would be of no use without the body. The Church when presented in Scripture as being the Body of Christ is the expression of a wonderful divine unity, and that unity is formed by the Holy Spirit. There is a thought in people's minds that we are united to Christ by faith. Such is not the case. Nor are we united to Christ by life—that is not the truth. We are related to Christ by faith, but that is not union; and we have the life of Christ, but that is not the thought that is presented in the expression here: "There is one body, and one Spirit" (Eph. 4:4). The Holy Spirit is the formative power of the Church of God, and the Holy Spirit is that by which the saints of God on this earth are united to a Man in glory. I said once before, that the Head of the Church was never dead. I repeat it, because I think it will help us to understand what is meant by the Headship of Christ in this way.

He who is now Head of the Church was once dead, but it was after He was risen from the dead, and had passed into glory, that He then took this new place, as Head of that which is called His Body. The Messiah died, the King of the Jews; but never the Head of the Church, because He was never Head of the Church till He was alive from the dead, and ascended. Ascension takes you to the spot where Manhood is now in glory, and we shall see that what the Lord Jesus is as Man before God, He shares with all those whom, in His grace, He is pleased to call His brethren. What He was as God ever remains the same—He did not cease to be God because He became Man. He took human nature in conjunction with the divine nature in His own Person when He came to earth. But He needed to become man in order that any of us should be united to Him. More than that: He had to die, as, in words so deeply expressive of what was in His heart He says, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24). Now that He is risen and glorified, we are united to Him by the Holy Spirit given to dwell within us. We could not have been united to Him if He had abode in His Godhead glory. It is as Man ascended up far above all heavens that He has become "Head over all things to His body the church."

In John 20 He could say to Mary, "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God" (John 20:17). He, the true "corn of wheat," unique in Himself, and always alone till He had died, is now able, as alive from the dead, to associate His own with Himself on resurrection ground. The Sanctifier and the sanctified are all of one before God. But this is not union yet. In Acts 1:5, we read that not many days thence, they were to be baptized with the Holy Spirit; and thus we know from 1 Corinthians 12:12 the Body of Christ was formed.

There is a notion abroad in Christendom that because Christ became incarnate He took fallen humanity into union with Himself; and thus elevated manhood. That would be Christ becoming one with us in our fallen condition. No, that He was alone, as become Man, it cannot be too earnestly pressed. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24). What is the rich harvest of fruit that sprang from that precious seed of corn falling into the ground in death? All who are Christ's from Pentecost till He comes. If you are a Christian you are part of it. He is risen, and now the truth is, not that Christ has become united to us, but that we by the Holy Spirit become united to Him. An old man once said to me, "Is it not glorious that He has become bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh?" I said to him: "That is a very wrong thought. It lowers Christ to our level. The truth is that He raises us to His level, and when risen from the dead makes us 'bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh.'" The one is false, unsound doctrine, that suits man in the flesh, because it is supposed to take up every man. The other is the truth of God, and applies only to those whom Christ can call His brethren, those who are born of the Spirit, washed from their sins in the Savior's blood, and sealed by the Spirit, so that they can truly say, "Abba, Father."

Let us now turn to the first epistle which speaks of the Body. "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. 12:4-5). You have Assembly truth alluded to here, but it is not unfolded. Here is the first teaching in the New Testament as to the Body of Christ, and the youngest believer can take in its meaning. "As we have many members in one body" alludes to our arms, fingers, and feet, and so forth—the many members in the human body, which is the figure Paul is going to use. "All members have not the same office." There is a great lesson in that. Each has its own function. "So we, being many, are one body in Christ." Who are the "we"? All Christians. You must not think of it as a society, a club, a mere organization, as men would say. Take the thought of the members of the human body, and then ask who compose the one body? "Many," in fact all Christians on earth today are of it, and compose the Body of Christ in its time aspect. What body do you belong to? In Scripture we only read of the one Body of Christ. All Christians are of it. "And every one members one of another"—I think that means, I cannot get on without you, and you cannot get on without me. Therefore what you see all around you today—the universally consented—to distinctions, differences, and dissensions among the people of God who are split up into numberless so-called "bodies" is only the work of the enemy, and you will find that what had produced these things is not that saints rally round the truth, but round some little difference. The uniting bond is some doctrine, or creed, or ordinance—it is not the glorious, wonderful truth of the unity of the Body of Christ, formed by the Holy Spirit here upon earth, and Christ, the risen ascended Man, the Head thereof in glory.

The “many” are one body in Christ, and surely if one be a member of that body that is quite enough. You say, But there are many “bodies” in Christendom today. True, but they are all going to be left behind by-and-by when the Lord comes for His own. They will all get their grave by-and-by, and be forgotten forever. And what about the Body of Christ? It will be forever with its Head in heavenly glory, its eternal destiny—everything else is to be left behind; and therefore I could not belong to any of these “bodies.” They are not scriptural—they are not lasting enough, not good enough for one who enters into what the Body of Christ is. “We, being many, are one body in Christ,” lets me know the body to which I and all Holy Spirit sealed saints belong. Every believing child of God today on the face of the earth is a member of that which He calls the Body of Christ. Every other membership, therefore, is superfluous, not to say false to the membership God has formed.

Now turn to 1 Corinthians 10 “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (vs. 16). That is the cup for which we give thanks at the Lord’s Supper; and the cup comes first because we can only get right with God on the ground of redemption by blood, and that is why the Spirit here emphasizes the fact of death by putting the cup before the loaf.

What is the meaning of the breaking of bread? Do you break bread just to be refreshed in spirit? I have no doubt you will be that, through the infinite grace of the Lord, but that is not the primary thought. It is the expression of the fellowship of the Body of Christ; it is the way in which the Body of Christ expresses its fellowship here upon earth; and of course that does not embrace the unconverted. If he wants to be there, what would you do? I should try to make him feel he had no right there. Not being a member of the Body of Christ—not knowing Christ as his own personal Savior—his true place is outside. If kept outside, he might learn his true state as unsaved, instead of being deceived by being given a position that does not belong to him; and, when awakened to that solemn discovery, he would want to get into the reality of what alone could meet that state, viz., finding Christ as a Savior. It is not that I have no interest in men’s souls—I have lived and labored to win them for Christ for more than forty years—but God’s Word makes it abundantly plain that no unconverted man has any right to be at the Lord’s Table. How dreadful to thoughtlessly take in your hands the bread and wine that speak of a Savior of whom you are utterly ignorant, and of a communion of His death in which you have no part. If you are a child of God, and a member of Christ, it is God’s will you should be there, unless there be some grave disqualification in your life and ways that puts you, in discipline, outside, and there may be such. If not, it is the privilege, the portion, and the responsibility of every member of Christ to be there, expressing the communion of the Body of Christ.

Why? “For we, being many, are one loaf, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one loaf (as it really is)” (vs. 17). What does our partaking of the loaf express? The unity of the Body of Christ of which each and every saint is a member—it is the company that has been formed by the Holy Spirit, of which we own that we are part, in partaking of the one loaf. But in chapter 11 you pass from the thought of the Body of Christ mystically to the human body of the blessed Lord, given for us in death. Thus you meet His wish, so touchingly expressed to His own the night He was betrayed. “And He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is My body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19). That is to say, God combines in the Lord’s Supper two thoughts—first, the Lord’s death is shown forth, and next, that which has been the result of that death, namely, the Holy Spirit coming down and the Church being formed here—one body—as it is of one loaf we partake. You eat in fellowship with all the saints of God, as you take that which is the memorial of Christ going into death for you, in necessary separation from and judgment in yourself of all that had to be met by that death in the judgment of God.

We must not confound the Lord’s Supper with John 6 There we read: “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life” (vss. 53-54). There we have the substance—of which the Supper is the shadow. It is really knowing Christ as the One who has died, and then in faith, and in the affection of your heart, you turn back to the cross where Jesus suffered. You can say, I shall never be there, because He was there. I eat the bread, and go back, in memory, in heart and affection, to the spot where He was once, but where He never will be again; and when you break the bread it is the memorial of a Christ that does not exist—there is no such Christ now. He liveth now and is alive for evermore, if He were dead. The broken bread and the cup tell us of Christ in that condition in which He once was, and never will be again—they tell us of a dead Christ: we know and love, and delight in a living Christ. The oneness of the Body is truly expressed in the breaking of bread—if the truth thereof be fully apprehended by our souls.

Now turn to chapter 12. “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:12-13). Note the language Paul uses here. He is talking of the Church, the Assembly of the saints of God down here, and when he has brought in his figure of the human body having many members, and yet forming but one body, he says, “So also is Christ”—I should have said, “So also is the Church”—no one else would dare to write what Paul wrote—“So also is Christ.” There is a Man in glory, and He has sent down the Holy Spirit, and gathered out of this world for God, and redeemed by His blood, a company of sinners, saved by grace; He has put them together by the Spirit, and they belong to Him; they are thus united to Him, as being His body, and He is the Head of that body; He is one with them, and they with Him; hence He said to Saul, “Why persecutest thou Me?” In persecuting His people Saul was persecuting Christ. He says, You are touching Me—My people and Myself are one.

I can understand now why he says, “So also is Christ.” What a wonderful thing the Church is. You say, The Church is only composed of men. Wrong. It is composed of men, but what of the Holy Spirit? You say, Is not Christ the Head, and are not men the Body? It has for its head Christ, and its unity is formed by the Holy Spirit, who is in each member; you must not forget that. You say, Oh, I did not think of that wonderful bond. There would be no Church but for the Holy Spirit. He indwells you, if a believer, and me also, and unites us to that ascended One in glory; and that same Spirit binds you and me together—“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” (vs. 13). What could be simpler? What puts a believer into the Body of Christ? The baptism of the Holy Spirit. That does not mean that there is a new baptism every day. Before the Holy Spirit came down, the Lord said to His own, as we have seen: “Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:5). The Holy Spirit came, this baptism took place on the day of Pentecost, and the Body of Christ was formed. For the moment it consisted of Jewish believers only; then in Acts 10 the Gentiles were brought in, not by Paul, but in the wisdom of God, through Peter. This was beautifully confirmed by what took place later in Jerusalem (see Acts 15), when the question was raised as to whether the Gentiles, who were not under law, should be put under law. It was decided at and promulgated from Jerusalem, that since they had received the Spirit, they were set free from everything that the Jew was under as such. The Body of Christ was to walk in subjection to its Head.

Why does the apostle elsewhere say, "Give none offense, neither to the Jews nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God"? (1 Cor. 10:32). The Church of God is a totally new structure, that has been brought into the scene, as formed out of both Jew and Gentile. It began at Pentecost, as we have seen, and since that day countless souls have been baptized into the One Body. You do not hear of a new baptism or a second baptism of the Spirit in Scripture, though people often speak in this fashion unintelligently, as though it were repeated. It is not. When people have got out of the seventh of Romans, and are free and happy before God, they speak of a second baptism. Most probably they are just tasting the first. The man in Romans 7 is full of himself, and therefore wretched; but a man who is in the liberty of the Spirit of God is very happy, for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit took place once, and once only, so far as I read of it in Scripture. How then do believers now receive it? may fairly be asked. I will reply by seeking to illustrate. I take you down to a park where there is a lake. It is a beautiful summer day, and there is not a ripple on the water. In that water for fifty yards all round the margin of the lake there are scattered rushes springing up, which approach nearly to the center of the lake. I take up a pebble, fling it, and it drops into the center of the lake. There is a little commotion—a circle forms on the surface; that circle spreads and widens out, and soon the nearest rushes get taken in. It widens further, and by-and-by the movement reaches to the very edge of the pond, and every rush is in. Now, as each soul is saved, by faith in Jesus, and is then sealed by the Spirit, it is embraced in the baptism of the Spirit, as the rushes were embraced in the ever-widening circle. This will go on till the latest and last member of Christ is brought into the Church, and then it will be caught up. There is no new baptism, but each believer, in his or her turn, gets into the circle. No illustration is perfect, but that is the best I know. The Spirit of God has come, and thus "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." Before the cross the Jew was bid to hold aloof from the Gentile, but now they are united, for they are brought into one body by the reception of the Holy Spirit, and are to walk in happy fellowship, since they have been made to drink into one Spirit.

In John 17 the Lord prayed to the Father, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me" (vs. 21). Did the world ever believe that the Father sent the Son? I think at the beginning, when they were all "of one heart and of one soul" (Acts 4:32), and were walking in the joy and love of Christ, the testimony to the world was so powerful that they were compelled to bow to the truth in multitudes, and this might have gone on so as to embrace the world, if the saints had been faithful. Those who did so were real and genuine. Easy-going lip-profession was not in vogue then, and, as I have before remarked, in Acts 5 people were not in such a hurry to "join the Church" as they are today. Would you join the Church if you thought God would cut you off by death for telling a lie? That is what it was then—unholiness in His House He would not stand, and Ananias and Sapphira died; but for the moment there was a beautiful testimony, and a lovely answer to the Lord's prayer—they had one object, they were delighting in Christ, seeking to serve Him, walking in love, and blessed, holy fellowship, and there was a oneness and unity that were not simulated. It was the oneness of love and of the Spirit that filled their bosom and controlled their life; but to our shame be it told, that did not last, and this testimony to the world broke down.

It is a great thing for every Christian to get into his soul the sense that there is "one body," and one only, and that—whether hitherto aware of it or not—he is a member thereof. Why did Paul say to the Corinthians, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:27)? Just to teach them and us this truth, and preserve us from accepting membership of anything that is not the local expression of this wonderful Body. You may perhaps have asked yourselves, What is meant by "The Body of Christ—its Local, Time, and Eternal Aspects"? which was the subject I announced for this afternoon's address. Here is the answer in part. This is the local aspect of the Body of Christ. Paul writes to the Corinthians, to all God's people in Corinth, "Ye are the body of Christ." They were not all the Christians in the world at that moment. No, but the local Assembly at Corinth was the expression of the greater truth. As my body is under the direction, the control, and will of my head, so was it to be in that day. The Assembly at Corinth being united to Christ in glory, and drawing all its supplies from Him, was to walk according to the figure used here, and so with the aggregate of the saints in every other place then and today also. The human body is sometimes afflicted with a disease called chorea, where the muscles are all in motion, and they will not keep quiet although the head desires they should. I think the Church of God has got that kind of disease today. The members are all doing their own will. It ought not to be so with the Body of Christ, but, alas, so it is.

It is really very important to see that when the Assembly of God is spoken of in any locality, it is viewed as being "the body of Christ" in that locality, and is responsible to walk as such. It is because this is not seen that Christians consent to the confusion now existing on every hand. If you admit membership of any one of the many ecclesiastical bodies on earth, it must necessarily shut you out from the others, hence I want that we should learn from God's Word the all-importance and divine sufficiency of simply recognizing the membership which, in the case of every believer, now exists as to the Body of Christ. If you have not got hold of the truth as to the Body of Christ, and that you are a member thereof, you will allow yourself in many things that the Word of God does not warrant.

Not long ago I was speaking to three Christian young men. One said he was a member of the Established body; the second, of the Free Church; and the third, of the United Presbyterian. I said to the first, "Now, who is the Head of your body?" "Oh, Christ," he replied; and the other two likewise claimed Christ as the Head of their respective bodies. "Has Christ then three bodies?" I asked. "Oh no, that would never do," they replied, in chorus. "Then you are each members of a body without a Head, and that is merely a trunk, a corpse." They then turned their queries on me, and asked what body I was a member of. My reply was easy. "I have never been a member of anything but the Body of Christ, and never mean to be. That is the membership which God in His grace accords me, and that surely is enough, and it takes in all that are His."

It is high time we Christians looked at Scripture, and judged ourselves by Scripture, as to this matter, for otherwise we must make a great mistake as to the mind of Christ. Where and what is the Body of Christ, say in Edinburgh, today? It is composed of all the saints of God in the town. Are they walking in unity, love, and order, according to the figure of the "one body" to which they all belong? Alas! no. Then what are we to do? I will tell you what I should like to do—I want to walk according to the truth, that is, according to the principle of the one Body of Christ. I do not suppose I shall get all the saints to act on this truth, but that is the real principle in Scripture, and I want it to have effect upon my life and ways, and I give you credit for the same.

"The body of Christ" then has a local aspect, which ought to be in evidence, while, at the same time, the truth of the whole Assembly on earth being regarded as the Body also, is clear from what the apostle immediately adds: "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles,

secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (vs. 28), which manifestly refers to the whole. These are chiefly spiritual gifts which were needed for the whole Church at the beginning, not all of which are found now. There are no apostles and prophets now. Why? They have done their work and passed off the scene; they were used administratively and by their teaching to lay the foundation, and on their written ministry we now repose—so we cannot give up a line of Scripture—nor is aught more to be expected. A man having dug out his foundation, lays his foundation stones, and then he goes on building. All that is wanted for God's work, in carrying on the rest of the building, we shall find in Ephesians 4, which chapter presents the body in its time aspect.

Let us now pass on to that epistle, and see how the truth comes out. The apostle is there occupied with developing the truth of what the Body of Christ is to the Head. The difference between Ephesians and Colossians is this—in Ephesians you have what the Body of Christ is to the Head; in Colossians you get what the Head is to the Body, even as in Romans and Corinthians you had the relation of the members to one another, in and as united to the Head. The danger of the Colossians was not holding the Head. Our added danger today is not seeing what it is to be an Ephesian—a person who knows himself to be in the counsels of God; and is then instructed how to walk according to his vocation, so as to correspond to what God in eternity predestined, and then in time called him to be.

The epistle opens with a lovely doxology: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1:3-4). There is the elective choice of God. The Church was the thought of God in eternity, before the foundation of the world; but the individual relationships are treated of first before the corporate are unfolded. You will never learn the truth corporately till you have learned it individually. God thinks of the individual believer first. God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Long before there was a world, upon which the first man sinned, the believer was chosen in Him to be "holy and without blame before Him in love." You say, I am not holy. But look—is not He holy, and without blame, and in love before God? Oh yes. Well, I am in Him, that is the point.

Then we read: "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved" (vss. 5-6). The eternal thought of God was to take up poor sinners, bring them to Himself, turning foes into friends, and enemies into children. It does not say that He has taken us into favor in Christ. Why? It is not warm enough. Nor even in Jesus. No—it is "in the beloved." Fathom that for me, tell me how much God loves His blessed Son—tell me the depth of the love of the Father to that blessed Son, of whom He spoke twice when He was on earth as "My beloved Son." That love is infinite, and He has taken us into favor "in the beloved." Did not I tell you that the Church was heavenly in being? She belongs to heaven, though she has to live on earth for a while.

Next we are told: "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (vs. 7). Who are the wonderful people who are chosen in Him? Are they unfallen angels? No, they are sin-stained sinners, who have been the servants of sin, and the slaves of the devil; them God has picked up and redeemed, and they are going to be the companions of Christ in glory. God's thought regarding Him, as also of Adam, was this, "It is not good that the man should be alone." The Church then is to be Christ's companion in eternal glory. Could any blessing be higher? Impossible, and nothing lower than that will content the heart that has grasped this truth. Sometimes I am asked if I am a "High Churchman." I always say, Yes, and quote Ephesians 1.

This first chapter gives us the purpose and counsel of God, and at the end of the chapter the apostle prays, "That ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (vss. 18-23). Christ is there seen as "head over all things to the church," which defines His position in relation to "all things," that is, absolute supremacy. In that position His Assembly is His fullness, since it is "His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all." It is He who fills all in all, but His Body then forms the complement of the Head. It is He who fills the universe with His glory; but, wondrous thought, He is not then alone, not isolated. The Head without the Body as its complement would be incomplete in glory. It is the Body that completes the Head then, and this gives us the eternal aspect of the Body, and the way we, as the heavenly Eve, come into the inheritance of all things that pertain to Christ as the last Adam. What a comfort to our hearts to know that He would not be happy in glory without us. Then will the blessed Lord's prayer be fully answered: "The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one. Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:22,24). We have not yet reached the glory, but we have already tasted what is better than the glory—the love which will bring us there.

The Church then is the complement—the fullness of Christ. What would the Head be without the Body? The organism is not complete, hence Christ must have His Church with Him in glory. I do not doubt that what is brought out here includes the whole Church.

This embraces every child of God, from the day of Pentecost right on to the Rapture of the saints. All will be there by-and-by, and then the Assembly will be "the fullness of him that filleth all in all." There I repeat is the eternal aspect of the Body.

In Ephesians 2 we have the counsels of God carried out in power, and we see how we are "quickened together with Christ, and raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (vss. 5-6).

Chapter 3 develops the mystery, giving us Paul's part in the work. "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery; as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (vss. 1-5). What was the mystery? The revelation of this wonderful new structure that he calls "Christ and the church" (chap. v. 32), viz., that Jew and Gentile should be absolutely one, united by the Holy Spirit to Christ in glory and to one another in a co-equality of privilege, so that they should both belong to Him, and be His Body here upon earth. You cannot find this in Old Testament Scripture.

People have an idea that the Old Testament saints formed part of Christ's Body, the Church. Impossible—because there was no Body till the Head was in glory, and He was not in glory, as a Man, in Old Testament days. The very existence of the Church as the Body of Christ depends upon the ascension of Christ on high and the coming down of the Holy Spirit. This purpose of God, so long concealed, and therefore called "the mystery," was "now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets," of the New Testament clearly, not Old Testament prophets. You may search the Old Testament from end to end, and you will find nothing about the Church. I know that in your Bible there is a great deal interpolated about it at the tops of certain chapters of Isaiah and the prophets; but that forms no part of God's Word. It was added by translators and commentators, that is, put in by men who were not intelligent, and people have been misled by it. Those prophets of the Old Testament wrote only of Israel and the Gentiles, who will come to the front by-and-by, and come in for blessing on earth in due time.

But we are speaking of Christ's Assembly, and it was not made known before Paul's ministry, "that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (vs. 6). The Gentiles are to be joint-heirs, joint-body, and joint-partakers with the Jew—the word is the same in each case. Jew and Gentile are to be welded into one, only the Jew ceases to be a Jew when he is brought into the Church, and the Gentile likewise ceases to be a Gentile. They are both on new ground, with new life, and new relationships altogether, being united to Christ and to each other in Him. This new structure needed a special vessel to reveal it, hence Paul says, "Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (vss. 7-8). By "the unsearchable riches of Christ" I apprehend that he means the mystery of Christ and the Church, and all the wonderful blessings which accrue to those who are now united by the Holy Spirit to the One in glory, in whom all those riches are treasured, who is Head of His Body here upon earth.

Paul was selected by the Lord "to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid (not in Scripture but) in God" (vs. 9). Though you may get many a shadow, type, or figure—which you can now apprehend as seen through New Testament spectacles—the truth of the mystery was never revealed in the Old Testament.

And now we get God's present object in the existence of the Assembly. It has its being "to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (vs. 10). What is the idea presented in this wonderful mystery? In chapter 1 our blessings are in heavenly places; in chapter 2 we are seated in Christ there. In chapter 3 the created intelligences in heavenly places who never saw God till they saw that lowly Babe in Bethlehem, and then saw the world get rid of Him, see now a company of people having the life of Christ, the Holy Spirit uniting them all together—out of the most opposed conditions of nationality and the like—and then through them the life of Jesus manifested here upon earth. They have a very interesting lesson-book. It is the Church; but I am afraid they are getting a very distorted view of divine things in these days, unless, as doubtless they can, they distinguish God's work, to carry out His own counsel, from our failure of realization of it.

How wonderful is the grace that can take up men and women, mold and shape them, put Christ into them and bring Christ out in them, and then make them the exhibitors of that blessed Man whom the world would not have. It makes Christianity a very serious thing.

Passing now to chapter 4, Paul says, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:1-2). If we get these graces in our souls, what the Lord enjoins on us is very easily carried out, namely, "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (vs. 3). This unity of the Spirit is not similarity of sentiment, but the oneness of the members of the Body of Christ which the Holy Spirit formed, and which we have to seek to maintain in the power of the Spirit. How contrary to this would it be to allow things the Word of God does not warrant, the effect of which is to divide me from my fellow-members. There is one Body, and only one, and you and I, dear fellow-Christian, are members of and belong to it. Then if we would be faithful to this truth, we must certainly disown membership of every other, though that is far from all that is included in the exhortation. Anything that is not framed and formed according to the pattern and doctrine of the unity of the Body, is not of God, and it is not glorifying the Lord, or for his own real blessing for a saint to go on with it.

Notice now the three circles the apostle presents: "There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling" (vs. 4). That shows us the circle of divine reality. That one Body and Spirit embrace every Christian, every child of God upon earth at this moment, even as the hope is one, of which the Spirit is the source and power.

Further, there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (vs. 5). That is the circle of public profession and acknowledgment of Christ as Lord. That is wide enough, and large enough. Many are baptized, but are their sins forgiven? If not, they are merely in the circle of profession, and that is a sad condition to be in.

Finally, we read that there is "one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (vs. 6). Three wondrous bonds of unity are here presented—the Spirit of God, the Lordship of Christ, and the omnipresence of God the Father. The apprehension of those mighty truths would form all believers into one.

The care of the Head for the Body is then developed in relation to the gifts which Christ bestows for the blessing and help of His own." But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore He saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men" (vss. 7-8). After He went up on high, we are shown the way in which the Body is nurtured and cared for. When Christ came into the world Satan ruled everywhere, drove his chariot through the world, and had every man chained to its wheels. Then Christ went into death, bore the judgment of God, overcame Satan, annulled his power, and now that He is risen from the dead, it is no longer man the vassal of Satan, but Man the blessed Victor over Satan. Jesus overcame him morally in the wilderness, and absolutely in death; and now He has picked up the very people that used to be the slaves of Satan, has put gifts into them, and sent them out to do the same blessed work He did Himself, that is, deliver men who have been under the power of Satan. He overcame Satan Himself, and now He fills these vessels with His Spirit according to His grace, and the sovereignty of His choice, and deposits in them spiritual gifts that enable them to preach the Word, and men are delivered, and brought to God.

"(Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things)" (vss. 9-10). I look up, and I see a blessed Man at God's right hand, and He is

going to fill all things. The whole scene will yet be filled with the glory of Christ, and that is why Scripture speaks of the day of Christ. You read of the day of the Lord—that is when all will be subject to Him. The day of Christ is when all will take color and character from Christ. But before and till that day He is the source and spring of all true ministry to His Church. Hence we read: “And He gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some, evangelists; and some pastors and teachers” (vs. 11).

These are the gifts necessary for the gathering together of those who are to be the companions of His glory, since they are the members of His Body. Apostles and prophets we have already considered; the others we will just glance at. The evangelist loves souls and brings them to Christ, and it is a blessed thing to go out with the gospel. An evangelist, however, should be like a pair of compasses—one leg fixed, and the other as long and wide-reaching as you like; but he is always centripetal—he brings the soul to the door of the Assembly, and says to his brethren, You had better see if he is genuine.

The pastor is occupied with the sheep—the saints in all their need; the teacher with the book—the Scriptures. They are put together. They are usually joined in the same person. These then are the gifts that Christ gives. There are no apostles now, nor prophets either, save as they exist for us in their writings; but the others He still continues to give while His Church is in this scene. Everything that is now needed for the growth and the upbuilding of the Body is still furnished. But they are for the whole Church—not a Church—there is no such thought as that in Scripture. This is quite plain from the next verse of our chapter, which says these gifts are given “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (vss. 12-13). The saints individually are to be perfected—this then branches out into the work of the ministry and the edifying of the (not a) Body, by which the perfecting is carried on. There is to be growth and upbuilding in the knowledge and apprehension of the Lord. And the effect is that God’s children are not “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (vs. 14). It is most deplorable to note the way saints are carried about with every wind of doctrine. It would not be the case if they went to Scripture, and to God for light, and believed that the Holy Spirit was here to lead, guide, and teach them all the truth.

The object and effect of divinely given ministry is to so act on the hearts and consciences of the saints that they are not carried into error, “but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (vs. 15). Love is ever active, and if you are in the enjoyment of God’s love, you will speak the truth in love. But all blessing is derived from “the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (vs. 16). Everybody has his or her part in God’s Assembly, the ministration of each member in its place tending to the edifying of the body in love. Perhaps you are nobody where you are, as a member of some unscriptural “body.” You get a sense of what it is to be a member of the Body of Christ, and you will find you have your niche, your part. Perhaps you will say, My part is a very small one. Never mind. Do the thing the Lord gives you; it might be only to give a cup of cold water—that would be a very useful thing to a thirsty soul; and the result is increase now and reward by-and-by.

In Colossians the great point is that Christ “is the head of the body, the church” (chap. 1:18), and the saints are urgently exhorted to hold the Head, derive from the Head, and draw from the Head. Forgetting to do that, rationalism and ritualism would be sure to affect them (chap. 2). That chapter puts man out absolutely; man is set aside and (chap. 3) love reigns, while the peace of Christ rules in the heart “to the which ye were called in one body” (vs. 15). This is what love effects—the love of Christ: “For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church” (Eph. 5:29). Nourishing is food, and cherishing is warmth—that is what babes want. Warm the saints with the love of Christ, and feed them with the truth of God, and they will grow. If “we are members of His body,” I cannot get on without you, dear fellow-Christian, and you cannot get on without me. We are one in Christ. God help us to understand something of the blessed truth of the oneness of the Body of Christ. It is indeed a UNITED CHURCH in Scripture, and will be so seen in glory shortly.

Another Comforter, Gifts of the Spirit, The (4:8-16)

It is important to note the marked distinction which appears in Scripture, between the gift of the Spirit, which we have been considering on previous evenings, and the gifts of the Spirit, which, with the Lord’s help, we will look at a little this evening. The gift of the Spirit is universal to every child of God, in his normal state now. That is, everyone who, through grace, has been born of God, and been led to believe in the Son of God, who knows what redemption is through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins, every such one has received the promise of the Father—the gift of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, he is not a Christian, in the full sense of the term, if he has not the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit therefore is that which, when received, sets the soul in the true Christian place. Now it does not follow that everyone who has received the gift of the Spirit is, necessarily therefore, a participator in these gifts of the Holy Spirit, some only of which are enumerated in the part of Ephesians 4 which I have read this evening. I am careful to say some only are enumerated, because you do not find anywhere, in the New Testament, a complete list of these spiritual gifts, which the Head of the Church has been pleased, by the Holy Spirit, to bestow on certain members of His body here upon earth. We hear about these gifts in Romans 12, in 1 Corinthians 12, and again in the chapter which I read this evening. The reason, I think, is very simple. If they were all in one list the veriest child, so to speak, could sum them up; but God has put them in many parts of His Word, hence the inquiring soul must search that Word to learn, and thus know His mind. You will find, furthermore, according to the place and position in Scripture, in which these spiritual gifts are spoken of, and unfolded, there exists a distinct difference in the aspect in which they are presented, as well as in the source from which they spring. In Romans 12 all flow from God; in 1st Corinthians 12 all flow from the Holy Spirit; and, in the fourth of Ephesians all flow from the ascended Head of the body, the exalted Man at God’s right hand, the Lord Jesus. Such a difference is, of course, of importance, and is instructive.

But first of all tonight we will look at the verses I have read (Eph. 4:7-16), which beautifully unfold, and present to us the grace of the Lord Jesus to His people here upon earth. In the epistle to the Ephesians the Church is presented in the fullest way, as being the body of Christ, united by the Holy Spirit to Him, where He now is in glory. It is therefore as to its origin, nature, and destiny, a heavenly body. The Head is in heaven, and the body is upon earth, and consequently needing all the varied sustenance for growth and blessing, which the Head alone can supply. The body is one, as the apostle tells us in verse 4, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your

calling." All which that body needs, as it passes through this scene, is supplied from Him, who is its Head in glory—the One who loves, with a deep and inextinguishable love, His assembly, His body here upon earth.

In order to nourish and cherish that assembly, He gives what is here presented. Now, the fact that the gift of the Spirit must not be confounded with the gifts of the Spirit, is very manifest in the seventh verse, where the sovereign, and absolute choice of Christ, in disposing of the gift, is stated plainly, even when the universality of the grace given is seen, for, "unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." The Lord, in His sovereignty, is pleased to deposit these spiritual gifts where He will. He chooses, and fits certain vessels, for certain work, according to His own will. It is not a question of the will of man, or of the choice of man, but of the sovereign grace of Christ, and, consequently, it is evidence of the utmost folly to quarrel with what is, or is not, in a certain vessel. You are quarreling with the Head of the body. You ask, Why has not that man so and so? It is a question of the sovereignty of Christ. He makes one an evangelist, another a teacher, another a pastor, and rarely combines all in one man, as Christendom would fain universally have, in its ministerial appointments. He gives spiritual qualifications, and usually physical suitability for the special service; giving "to every man according to his several ability," as we read in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25).

Now see whence these gifts flow, because it is a matter of deep importance to be quite clear thereupon. That ministry, which is the exercise of a spiritual gift, has its source only in Christ. You cannot manufacture ministers. If already gifted of Christ, such need not man's help or instruction to make them ministers. He has made them such in sovereign grace, in view of the need of His body. If they be not gifted by Christ, human learning, and even human ability to speak, will never make them true spiritual helps. Ministry is the exercise of a spiritual gift, which has come from the Lord Jesus, and certain members of His body, are made ministers, through the exercise of His own sovereign grace and choice.

Now, I repeat, where does this ministry flow from? Nothing can be more beautiful than the next verse. "Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." You have here three things said about the Lord as Man. He is the ascended, glorified Man; secondly, as Man, He ascended after He had led captivity captive, when He had overthrown the power of Satan; and thirdly, when ascended, as Man, He received and gave gifts unto men. As you know, this verse is a quotation from the 68th Psalm, and I will read it, because the way in which He is presented in the Psalm is a little different. "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them" (vs. 18). That He is Man gone up, the second of Acts shows, Let us turn to it. At the thirty-second verse we read, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." As the ascended, victorious, triumphant Man, He received gifts in person. First of all He received the Holy Spirit, in this new way as Man in glory for us, but He received Him for a special and twofold purpose, not alone to give that Spirit to all His own on earth, as the indwelling Comforter, but likewise to make some of them the depositories of spiritual power by that Spirit, to be exercised in bearing testimony to His glory. He makes those vessels which have been hitherto the slaves of sin and Satan, henceforth the vessels of His own grace to others round about. "Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." Truly it is beautiful to see the place whence ministry flows, namely, the Lord Jesus, as the ascended Head of the Church, in glory.

Christ has been down here, has seen the misery of man, and the malignity of Satan, has defeated the one, and delivered the other, and then gone on high to carry on His work of grace. That is what the next verse of our chapter brings out—"Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things" (vss. 9-10). He has been in this scene, as Man, and met man's victor and captor, Satan. Morally He overcame him in the wilderness, where as you know, when tempted to the uttermost for forty days, He completely defeated the enemy, by dependence, and obedience, so that he left Him. He then came out, and, having bound the strong man, He rifled his palace, the world, spoiling his goods—in other words, delivering his captives, and setting them free. Still there remained work to be done. The question of sin before God had to be taken up, and Satan's title over man, as a sinner, had to be met. Further, He Himself must pass back into glory, and on the ground of the work He was to accomplish, He would have those who are His, with Him. When therefore He descended into the lower parts of the earth, I apprehend that the descent there spoken of, is not His coming from heaven to earth, when He assumed manhood, but the cross and its consequences.

The Lord Jesus goes down to death, as the judgment of God upon man, and, in death, which is the power that Satan can use over man, He annuls him, and becomes the complete victor. In death He conquers. If I may say so, in the very center of Satan's kingdom, the domain of death, which has overcome every other man, He is victorious, for He rises out of it, and then goes on high, and fills all things in the love, and power, and glory of the redemption He has wrought. He goes to heaven! What for? Not to demonstrate His victory over Satan, as the humble, dependent, obedient, self-emptied man, but He goes up that He may take up with Him those whom He has delivered by His grace. "When he ascended up on high he led captivity captive." When the Lord came to earth what did He find? He found the devil the master of the situation, and man a poor willing slave, bound to the wheels of Satan's victorious chariot, But oh! what a difference Christ has made. All is changed. It is not now Satan the victor, and man the captive. It is Man, in Christ, that is the victor, and Satan who is the captive, completely annulled as to his power, for faith, by the obedience and death of Jesus.

The very first thing the Lord does, as He passes into glory and receives the Holy Spirit, is to send Him down. What to do? To use those who had been Satan's captives, but whom He has delivered and saved, to spread the tidings that would set countless myriads of poor captives free, and this is the only present proof of the bringing to naught of Satan's power. Ah! it is a wonderful thing to be the recipient of any gift from Christ, gift not to be used for our own glorification, but for the spread of the testimony to the Son of God, in a way that carries blessing with it to others round about us. That is the way ministry is presented in this fourth of Ephesians.

In the eleventh verse, where some of the gifts are enumerated, we read, "And he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers." I apprehend this to mean, not that the Lord gave special spiritual capacity, or spiritual power to certain persons, but, rather, that having already endued these persons with spiritual power, and made them the possessors of a special gift, He gave them in this characteristic way to His Body, the assembly. Pastors and teachers are what you may call a conjoint gift. They appear to be coupled in the same person, as I shall show you presently. One is of very little value without the other, and as a matter of practical interest

we find they are generally united in the same individual. The man who is only a teacher, without being a pastor, rarely sees very much good of his labor; and the man who is only a pastor, without being a teacher, has not the same sphere of usefulness that he would otherwise have, if he had also the power to teach. The Lord puts them together here.

Let us now look at these gifts for a moment—gifts given through the love of Christ to His assembly on earth. First observe the object. “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (vs. 12). It is beautiful to see the way in which the Spirit presents the Lord's objects in giving these gifts. First of all, we have their ultimate aim, “the perfecting of the saints,” that is, that the saints individually should really be brought into the appreciation and enjoyment of what belongs to them in Christ. Truth is always for the individual first. If we are not right individually, how can we be right collectively? If we are not happy individually, how can we be happy collectively? If we are not rejoicing in the Lord individually, how can we do so collectively? Therefore, here, as always, the individual state is first brought before you. Then comes, as the intermediate means by which this object is carried out, “for the work of the ministry.” The gifts go out into the work of the ministry, in various aspects and directions. This, as I have already said, is the fruit of Christ's gift, and is not due to human intelligence, or human knowledge. A man might be a brilliant speaker, but, in the midst of the assembly, unless he have spiritual power, he has not the ability to minister to real profit. You may find men able to talk to any extent, but unless they possess gift from Christ there is never any grace, unction, or power about it. One is reminded by such of the proverb, “Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain” (Prov. 25:14). You wait in vain for refreshment. On the other hand, you might have a man who has no eloquence, and yet whose ministry—fruit of Christ's gift—may be most precious, valuable, and useful to the saints. The Apostle Paul, speaking of himself, says, others judged “his bodily presence weak, and his speech contemptible.” Yet no man would say his ministry was contemptible, not even his enemies could say that.

There was also for this object of perfecting the saints, “the edifying of the body of Christ”—the building up, the growth of the body of Christ. This gives us the distinct object of the Lord in giving these gifts. He continues to give them, and we learn what the use to be made of them, what His wonderful thought in bestowing them, is, “till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (vs. 13); so that which the saints need here will be continually supplied by the Head of the Church, so long as the body remains on earth. There will not be a moment of the Church's passage through the world, when you will not find these gifts existing; whether they are fulfilling their functions, in due order, is entirely another matter, that should exercise the possessors thereof. Whatever gifts, however, are necessary for the blessing of souls, for the growth of the saints, and for the edifying of the assembly, will continue to be given by the Lord, so long as the assembly is in this scene, that is until He comes to take His bride home, to dwell with Him in glory, where these functions are no longer necessary.

Let us look for a moment at the different character of gifts spoken of here. “He gave some apostles; and some prophets.” These come together in the New Testament, and are frequently in the same person. Paul, notably, was a prophet, as well as an apostle (see Acts 13:1). What the special functions of these were, we find in the second chapter of Ephesians, “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (vs. 20). You have not here the prophets of the Old Testament referred to, as some would be inclined to think, and the apostles of the New Testament. If that were so the order would be reversed. Scripture puts it thus, “apostles and prophets”; and of the New Testament undoubtedly, because the prophets of the Old Testament did not know a bit about the Church. They were neither of it, nor in it. They might, and did prophesy of the sufferings of Christ, and of the coming glories of the kingdom, and as one part has been fulfilled, so the rest of their prophecies will come true, but the apostles and prophets here spoken of were those who were to bring out the mystery, the distinctive truth as to God's assembly, the body of Christ, founded on redemption, the death, resurrection, and ascension to glory of the Lord Jesus.

The Church of God is based upon the truth of the death of Christ, who, as Man, has gone into death, and come up out of it, and from whom, as ascended, the Holy Spirit has come down. Again, these apostles were not the twelve. I do not think the twelve, sent out by the Lord, are so much as alluded to in this scripture, for none of them reveal the Church, as the body of Christ, in their written ministry. I judge it alludes to the Apostle Paul, and to the others who were with him, in bearing this testimony. Barnabas, his fellow worker for long, is called an apostle, and I have no doubt there were others. In Ephesians 3:1-9, and Colossians 1:24-27, we are distinctly told, that the revelation of the mystery was first of all given to Paul, and, as unfolded by him, it was doubtless carried and preached by others also. It is, therefore, to the apostles and prophets of the New Testament that this scripture refers undoubtedly. The apostles and prophets in their ministry, oral and written, lay, and are the foundation upon which the Church of Christ is built.

Have we then still abiding such gifts as apostles and prophets? Clearly, we have them in their writings, and in the truth as unfolded by them, but we should know perfectly well, that their special functions having been exercised, there is now no longer any necessity for their repetition, and for this reason. They laid the foundation, and you know when the foundations of a house are laid, all you have to do is to go on building. Consequently, every man who professes now to have the apostles' office is in a very awkward position. Apostolic succession is claimed, but I venture to say to those who claim it, Look at what the Holy Spirit says of those who shall come as successors of the apostles. In the twentieth of Acts you read, “After my departure grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock” (vs. 20). And what He said has turned out perfectly true. Again, in the second chapter of the Revelation, we read, “Thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars” (vs. 2). So that any man who now assumes to occupy the serious ground of apostolic succession, is committing a grievous mistake, and placing himself in very reprehensible company. You say, That is very serious. It is very serious for the man, because it is so plain in the Word of God. When God speaks, His word should surely be heeded.

The apostles and prophets, then, of the New Testament unfold the truth, bring out the mind of God, and lay the foundations, and the faith of the saints is built upon that which God has revealed by their testimony in early days. There is a passage in the last of Romans which will make this quite clear to every subject mind. There we read—“Now to—him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets [prophetic writings], according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Rom. 16:25, 26). Clearly you have here the prophetic writings of the New Testament referred to, which, thank God, we hold in our hands.

Then, in the next place, you find, He gave "some evangelists." I need not say much about them, although the gift of the evangelist is a most precious one. I know perfectly well it is thought to be simple, and is sometimes looked down upon for that reason. Still it is remarkable that here, where it is a question of the Lord giving that which is for the blessing and good of the assembly, evangelists are spoken of, because if you had no evangelists the assembly would not grow. The evangelist is full of the Gospel, and what is the Gospel? It is the revelation of the heart of God, and what can be higher than that? It is the unfolding of the testimony about His Son, and the object of the evangelist is to bring souls to Him, and thus, as a consequence, into the assembly. The evangelist is a man who busies himself with souls. He has a burning love for them, and an unquenchable thirst for their salvation. His object is by all means to win the soul for Christ, yet, mark you, he is, if laboring rightly, working out from the bosom of the assembly. He is of the assembly. His work, therefore, though in no ways in, yet goes out from the assembly, and the soul that is laid hold of, and led to Jesus, becomes a member of His body, and, when all was in its normal order, would be found amongst the gathered ones; and nothing else is still His order. The evangelist should be like a pair of compasses, one leg is fixed, and the other is to sweep all round as far as it can reach. If his work is to be successful not only in conversion, but really in edifying the body, he must have a fixed leg, that is he remembers he is of the assembly, and works out from, and returns to it. In a certain sense it is his Gilgal. Too many evangelists look upon their work as a sort of guerilla warfare, They are spiritual sharpshooters, free lances, delighting in being "unattached." In all such, will is working. They are like a man who brings out a lot of stones from a quarry, and having got them into the road, has no place to build them into—no building to fit them in. You would surely say of all such that they are loose, careless workmen. I ought to have a definite object before me in preaching the Gospel; first, to bring the soul to Christ, and, secondly, to put it into its right niche in God's assembly on earth. It is not that the evangelist may always be used in this. Others have to be satisfied as to the reality of the fruit of his labor.

The wise evangelist will not in any way press the apparent fruit of his labor into the assembly; and I am speaking now of those gathered in the principles of it. He would be very lacking in wisdom if he did so, in my judgment, because the evangelist, from the very nature of his gift, is a warm-hearted, sanguine man, led much by his own fervency of spirit. Look at Philip, who is the first, and only man in the Bible, as far as I know, who is called "the evangelist." In Acts 8 what is he doing? Preaching Christ, getting numbers converted, turning the city upside down, and longing for the apostles to come down. He was admitting many outwardly to the house of God on earth, by baptism; had baptized Simon the sorcerer, on a confession of faith, and would doubtless have let him into fellowship with the saints had it not been for Peter. I have no doubt Philip thought he had caught a great fish when he heard that "Simon himself believed also." But as the result showed he had not got him. It needed the calm discernment of Peter to show the real position of Simon, and very sad it was "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter; for thy heart is not right in the sight of God" (vs. 21). The Lord's care for His assembly, and for His evangelist, is very touching in this scene. What a cheer is it to know that He is still the same; so one can joyfully say, The Lord help all the dear evangelists, cheer them, and encourage them, and increase their number a thousand-fold. If you are wise, and really walking "in the fear of the Lord, and the comfort of the Holy Ghost," you will help them by every means in your power.

Now, what should the evangelist do when he gets the soul converted? He should introduce him to the assembly, not necessarily bring him into it. Others should do that. It is well to let others judge of the reality and soundness of God's work in the soul. They are responsible to do so. Perhaps you say, he should now teach him. No; the teacher should teach him. I quite admit that, owing to the ruin of the Church, the evangelist often has to seek to do it, but it is not his work. Owing to the ruin and failure of the Church, practically speaking, many of the gifted servants of God do not do the part for which they are fitted. The reason is this. Many of those who really possess gifts, and are themselves gifts of Christ to the Church, are buried. Yes, I believe untold numbers of them—to use a figure—are buried under the ruins of Christendom. Hampered, hindered, and restrained by ecclesiastical systems, that necessarily prevent the exercise and development of gift, they are not exercising the gift the Lord has given them. They have been dislocated from their true functions by the purely human organizations with which, alas! Christendom abounds, and in which the free activity of the Holy Spirit, in the gifted members of Christ's body, is hindered by that which man calls "the ministry," but which God cannot so account, as, in principle, it is opposed to the direct and plain directions, nay, the commandment of His Word.

The place of the Holy Spirit has been usurped in Christendom by man, which has this serious effect, that numbers of those, who are really gifted servants of Christ, are silent, and are not exercising their gifts, because, from the very constitution of the ecclesiastical associations in which they find themselves, there is not liberty for the exercise of their gift. Many again are, in their timidity, which one cannot but admire, afraid lest they trench upon the office, and work of those whom they may regard as specially called to minister in the things of God—a ministry, be it observed, to which these silent ones have also been called, but to which they are not, from what is called "order"—man's order—responding.

How beautiful is the divine order in God's assembly! First, the evangelist reaches the soul, and brings him to the gateway of the assembly, and leaves those who are therein to test him, and, if confident of him, to receive him, for it cannot be too strongly asserted, that it is the assembly, as a whole, that receives. Each and all composing it are responsible—not only the laborers, or those who may commend souls that seek admission. When the young convert, judged to be born of God, and indwelt of the Spirit, is admitted, he is to be instructed. Let us beware of keeping souls out of the assembly until they have as much intelligence as those within. Such a thought is very common, and some saints have the idea that all such should be kept outside, until they have got a certain amount of intelligence. That shows how little intelligence they possess who would act on such lines, and how little they really know the mind of the Lord, because, you see, when a child is born, it needs a great deal of nursing, attention, and care. Now the assembly, if walking rightly, is just the place to find all this, and is the spot to which the newborn soul is rightly led by the evangelist, in the expectation that there, if anywhere, will be found plenty of nurses, glad to foster, and help the infant life given of God. Would that we saw more of this.

Then come the "pastors and teachers." Now a pastor is not less important than a teacher. The pastor occupies himself with the state and growth of the soul. The teacher is more occupied with the Word of God, seeking to unfold that which God has therein given. The two foundation gifts, of apostles and prophets, abide permanently in the Scriptures, but the evangelists, the pastors, and the teachers exercise their gifts, as given by the Lord, in their living ministry until there be no more saints on earth to be perfected. The apostles and prophets give us the truth. The evangelist carries out to the world its special portion thereof—the Gospel—and brings in the young souls. Thereon the pastor begins the exercise of his gift, looks after them, and sees how they are going on. His work is most beautiful, if by no means prominent, because the pastor is more of a shepherd, and it is not a question of preaching with him. His voice may never be heard in the assembly at all. He goes in and out, and looks after the need of souls. I believe his is very much house-to-house work, and happy work it is. The teacher is he

whom God specially prepares to unfold His Word, already given and recorded in Scripture. He is busy with the book—digs out its treasures, and feeds the saints thereby. His work, for the most part, is in the assembly. Of necessity God is careful of them as to temporal things, for in another epistle it says, “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things” (Gal. 6:6). These teachers might be men who have no means of livelihood, and the Lord is careful for all such—even as the evangelist is not forgotten, for we read, “Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:14). It is noteworthy however, that while Paul lays down this principle, he immediately declines its application to himself (vs. 15). The true shepherd thinks only of the sheep, not of his own support. He thinks of their spiritual need. They should think of his temporal necessity, but all must be a matter of grace, not law. When ministry is reduced to a “bread trade,” than which nothing could be more dreadful, it savors sadly of Balaam and his ways (see 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11); nevertheless it should be the joy, as it is the duty, of the taught one, to communicate with him that teacheth, in all good things.

We get, then, in this chapter the heavenly aspect of the source of ministry in the assembly, flowing from the Lord Jesus on high, and it is perfectly plain that these qualifications for ministry can never be communicated by man, nor can they even be fostered by man. They only grow by exercise, like the blacksmith's biceps. Therefore you cannot make a minister of Christ. It is Christ alone that can make him, and if he be made by Christ, it is the privilege and responsibility of the saints to receive, not to remake him. All that the servant of Christ has to do is to find out the nature of his gift, and then steadily and unhinderedly to go on, in the exercise thereof, in his right niche, in the body of Christ—the One body—of which he is a member.

Let us turn back now to Romans 12, not that I shall dwell on it, but that you may see there how the gifts are referred to, as belonging to the whole body. “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching” (vss. 4-7). We have very simple and distinct instructions to those who have any gift from the Lord for special work; they are to use it “according to the proportion of faith,” or “according as God,” who is the source of the gifts, and all else in Romans, “hath dealt to every man the (or a) measure of faith” (vs. 3).

We will pass now to the first epistle to the Corinthians. The epistles to the Corinthians are remarkable, in this respect, that the receivers are the only company, or assembly, in the New Testament, that is addressed as “the Church of God.” Both first and second epistles are addressed “Unto the Church of God which is at Corinth.” The subject is all that pertains to the order of the Church on earth, and you are brought in this first epistle very distinctly upon Church ground, and therein receive an immense amount of instruction as to the assembly, and the manner of its conduct. It is, in fact, the object of the epistle. What you have in 1st Corinthians is the assembly in function here upon earth, and you find that it is endowed by the Lord with all that it needs. People are fond, sometimes, of talking about Church endowment. I believe the real endowment of the Church you have recorded in the 1st Corinthians.

The assembly is endowed by Christ with all that she needs in her pathway on earth. In chapters 12, 13, 14, we get profound and detailed instructions as to spiritual gifts, and also as to the assembly. I think you will find that the three chapters must be taken together to learn their true import. They have been dislocated very often, by taking out chapter 13, which is so full of love. In another part of Scripture we are told that “God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7). Now I believe that these three characteristics, power, love, and a sound mind, are just what the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth chapters of 1st Corinthians bring out. In the twelfth chapter it is the spirit of power, the Holy Spirit as power, in the assembly, “dividing to every man severally as He will.” In the thirteenth chapter it is the spirit of love, and in the fourteenth it is the spirit of a sound mind. Everything there must be for profit.

The twelfth chapter gives in much detail the varied operations and manifestations of the Holy Spirit in different members of the body. We learn further that, no matter what the magnitude of the spiritual gift may be, of which you read in chapter 12, it is of no real value, in chapter 14, where the assembly is before us, in function, for worship, unless it be baptized into, permeated, and regulated by the spirit that governs the thirteenth chapter. And what is that? Love! And what does love do? It never thinks of itself. Love always thinks of others, and the apostle taught these Corinthians this lesson. They were proud of their gifts. They were like children with so many new toys, which they wished to show off. They spoke in different tongues, and did so, though nobody knew what they said. And the apostle corrects them. “How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying” (ch. 14:26). They were all anxious, and seemingly determined, to get the gift displayed which they thought they possessed, and the apostle in the plainest way corrects them.

Time fails to deal at length with chapter 12, but this may be said, it is a description of the varied spiritual manifestations which are to be found in the assembly. They all flow from the Spirit, as down here in testimony for Christ as their source. Verse 4 says, “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. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.” That is the keynote of the three chapters, “to profit withal.” In passing, let me say that this verse has been most mischievously misinterpreted. Based on its supposed meaning, has actually gone forth the idea that every man, Jew, Turk, infidel, believer, and unbeliever promiscuously, has the Spirit. I shall not wound the feelings of any one in mentioning that the Society of Friends holds that every man has the Holy Spirit in him. They call it by various names, “inward light,” “divine light,” or “a ray of eternal wisdom,” but it is supposed to be the Spirit, and they think they find support for the theory in this verse, “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.” But manifestly it is not a question of man, as man, here. It is in the assembly, where you have the saints of God, all of whom possess the gift of the Spirit, and some of whom have different gifts for ministry by the Spirit. And for whose benefit are these spiritual manifestations? Not for any one's own private use, but for the benefit of others. That is the point, and when you come to chapter 14 you have instruction as to what would be profitable for the assembly.

You find, in the plainest language, that edification is the keynote of all these chapters, whilst the Spirit of God was the source of these varied gifts. “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 by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit,” and so on. “But all these worketh that one, and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will” (ch. 12:8-11). It is the Holy Spirit who acts for God, and He it is, who is the source and spring, in the assembly, of

these varied manifestations. At the close of the chapter the apostle says, "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles; secondarily prophets; thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." And why does he put them in their normal order? The reason is this? The Corinthians were so inflated with the power they possessed of being able to speak in unknown tongues; they were so inflated by possessing these gifts, which would pass away, that the apostle brings out what their relative value is, and where does he put this gift of tongues? Last. They put them first. He puts them last. "Whether there be tongues, they shall cease" (ch. 13:8). The only value of the tongues was to be a sign to those without—not within the assembly, as he says in the fourteenth chapter, "tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not" (ch.14:22).

The gift of tongues was, as I have said before, God ringing the bell to the inhabitants of earth, so to speak, that they might hear about His Son Jesus. It was a valuable sign, the gift of tongues, and it was not inappropriate if those were present, who, knowing the language, could interpret; that failing, the tongue was useless, and the possessor was to be quiet. But, notwithstanding, they were to covet earnestly the best gifts; "and yet show I unto you a more excellent way." What is that? Love certainly. It always seeks the good of others. "Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto man, but unto God; for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." Prophecy was not only the unveiling of future events, but it brought the conscience into the light of God's presence, and was for "edification, for exhortation, and for comfort." How different this from merely speaking what no one could profit by. In the fourteenth chapter Paul says, "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." You see the truth was working practically in his own heart. The only thing he thought of in the assembly, was the profit of others.

This subject of profit is equally true in the matter of prayer and singing. "I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. Else, when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at the giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? for thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified" (ch. 14:15-17). If I sing, if I pray, if I speak, what is the good of doing so unless the rest are edified? I once said to a friend of mine, "I never say 'Amen' to your prayers." He looked surprised and asked, "Why?" "Because," I replied, "I never hear what you say. You mumble so much in your prayers, that I am unable to hear what you say, and I am not going to say 'Amen' to a promiscuous number of words, which I do not hear." Everything should be done for the profit of others, and to this singing is no exception. Everybody thinks it is a very easy, and most simple thing to give out a hymn. But I must "sing with the spirit," and, as Paul concludes, "with the understanding also." Thus it is that a hymn, when given out, in the assembly, ought to be the expression of that which is at the moment felt by the assembly. It is therefore a very serious thing to give out a hymn there. A person may say, "But I had that hymn laid on my heart." That is no indication for giving a hymn out, because a woman might have a hymn on her heart, yet she is bidden to be quiet and not give it out. One never should give out a hymn, or do aught else in the assembly, unless with the distinct sense—I have the leading of the Lord in doing this, and, I know that I shall express His will in doing it.

In the close of chapter 14, the apostle speaks of the very important point, of direct subjection to the Lord, by the Spirit of God, and of how God's assembly should behave when gathered together in the Lord's name. We read in verse 23—"If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth" (vss. 23-25). There is an immense difference between the value of the gift of tongues, and of the prophetic gift, if used in the Spirit of God. Then he adds—"How is it, brethren, when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation?" that is, every one when he came to the assembly had something on his mind, and gave it forth. No man who has the sense of what it is to be before the Lord, and believes in the presence, and guiding of the Spirit, would so act. What may or may not take place must be unknown till we are there, and then "Let all things be done unto edifying" is the injunction.

But notice, Paul does not correct disorder by prearrangement, and putting all into one man's hands: nor, to those who had the power of speaking in different tongues, does he say, You must not speak. No, he says, "If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret." Very simple are these instructions, and much better than saying, No man should speak with an unknown tongue. That would be to quench the Spirit. You see, to prevent the Holy Spirit acting, by any allowed member of the assembly, is to fall into the snare that we are warned against in the fifth chapter of 1st Thessalonians, "Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings" (vss. 19, 20). How do we quench the Spirit? you ask. The individual may grieve the Holy Spirit, but in the assembly, and only in the assembly, can you quench the Spirit. In the assembly there is to be every scope for all possible activity of the Holy Spirit by every member whom God permits to speak. This can refer only to men, as "Let your women keep silence in the assemblies, for it is not permitted unto them to speak," is the injunction regarding these latter. If this liberty be not allowed, He is quenched, a solemn charge I am bound to bring against every congregation, that does not give Him the fullest scope to use any and all. The Spirit of God is not to be quenched, and it would have been quenched, had the apostle sought to rectify disorder by silencing the tongues. So far from that, he says in verse 39, "Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to SPEAK WITH TONGUES." But he also adds, "If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course (separately); and let one interpret." There must be an interpreter. "But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; let him speak to himself, and to God. Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge."

This is God's distinct instruction, and revealed mind and will, for His assembly, when together. Nothing could be plainer, and, with sorrow be it said, nothing has been more unheeded by the Church. The rule in almost all ecclesiastical bodies has been to place all, beforehand, in the hands of one man. Thus is the Spirit quenched, and as a consequence all suffer. But why, in the midst of the assembly, do you think, has the Holy Spirit said two or three prophets, and two or three only, may speak? Why not four, five, or six? I think it is a practical proof of the unerring wisdom, and tender care of our God. If, when gathered in assembly, we have listened to two or three addresses from our brethren, we have received about as much as we can well take away, and if we had more, it is very likely there would be little profit therein, as bodily weakness would in some, if not all cases, assert itself. God knew very well what our life here would be, and consequently He knew there would be claims, and calls at home, that in due course must be obeyed, and, therefore, He would not have the meeting of His assembly so indefinitely protracted, that some would be under the necessity of running away from the assembly, before the meeting was concluded.

Everything was to be of such a nature that all would be done “decently and in order,” therefore he says, “Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge. If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.” I do not say that the first must finish speaking before the other rose, There were not to be two or three speaking at once, as was sometimes the case, so determined were they to be heard. If the Spirit of God made a sign that He wanted to use a certain vessel, then “let the first hold his peace.” He was to be subject to the Spirit. “If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.” Even the wisest prophet may learn from his brother.

Today we have this curious state in Christendom, that the whole capacity and function of the assembly, both in worship and ministry, is supposed to be wrapped up in one man, who is to go to God for the people, and to the people for God. This is not after the pattern of 1st Corinthians 15, You meet a Christian man on Lord's Day morning, and ask him where he is going? He says, I am going up to worship. On further inquiry, you will usually find he is going to hear someone, more or less gifted, preach. Is that the conception you would draw from the fourteenth of Corinthians? No. The thought in your friend's mind is not so much worship, which is what flows from the gathered saints to God, as that of ministry, connected with some individual who will address, and possibly help, and comfort him. No doubt there is warrant in Scripture for teaching, but we ought to call things by their right names, and not label ministry, which is a precious privilege, with a name—worship—that carries a totally different idea, at least in Scripture. You have come to hear me speak, but this is not the assembly, and hence not a meeting for worship. This is a mere gathering, of those whom I take for granted are the children of God, to hear what an individual servant of Christ, in the exercise of any little gift he may possess, has to say. How different a matter is it to be gathered before the Lord in the assembly. There I read, “Ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets, For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.”

At this point, and because he had just said, “Ye may all prophesy,” there comes in a qualification, “Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.” This verse might as well be taken out of Scripture altogether, for of what avail is it to bid women be silent, when the almost absolute rule in modern Christendom is that all the men, save one, shall be. Ah! here is where the Church has grievously failed. She has not had faith in the Holy Spirit. That there is something seriously wrong is plain, for this scripture is absolute in its statement, as to what the Lord would have in His assembly, and if I am not walking with the saints according to the principles of, and in absolute subjection to the commands, and instructions, of the fourteenth of Corinthians, I am really throwing away my mercies, and going directly in the face of my Lord's command.

Paul knew very well that what he was saying would not be acceptable to all in the assembly at Corinth, and, therefore, he says, “What! came the word of God out from you? or, came it unto you only?” What does he mean by that? As I have said, he knew very well that what he was bringing out was not acceptable to many minds, therefore he says as it were, Are you the source of the word of God, or is it God that gives the word through me, to you, to instruct you? Are you going to be teachers or taught in this question? “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write are the commandments of the Lord.” Every Christ-loving heart will now have to ask itself this question, Am I keeping His commandments in respect of 1 Corinthians 14? Am I gathered to His name where the Holy Spirit is allowed His own way in the assembly.

Then follows a very striking verse, “But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.” I do not think there is much comfort in being ignorant, and there is no credit in so remaining, with such plain teaching before our eyes, as to what the Lord would have. If I shut my eyes to the plain, distinct teaching of the Word of God, then I shall not know the truth. “If any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant,” is a caustic that I would fain not have applied to me. It applies to the one who will not see what God enjoins. “Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues,” is the conclusion of the whole matter, and is pregnant with grace. “Let all things be done decently and in order” (vs. 40), is the inscription graven over the door of God's assembly, and I should ever see it there as I enter; and it is well also to remember that it is written, “He taketh the wise in their own craftiness” (1 Cor. 3:19), for, if I may say so, when I go to the assembly of God, this verse would seem just to say, This is God's house; if you come in here you will be found out, therefore, “Let everything be done decently and in order.”

Handfuls of Purpose, Gospel, the Church, and the Servant, The (4:1-16)

(Ephesians 4:1-16)

I have before my mind, the Lord helping me, to glance a little at the way in which the gospel and the Church, the Assembly, are connected in Scripture, with the service that is afforded to us by the Lord in His grace. It is of vital importance to be clear as regards the service that is connected, on the one hand with the gospel, and, on the other, with the Assembly, as the Body of Christ, and to know what the relation of the servant is to Christ, as his Lord, and to the Assembly, of which he is an integral part.

Now, beloved friends, it is an immense mistake to separate the gospel from the Church. I do not see how that can enter anybody's mind. The gospel is the revelation of the heart and nature of God. The Church is the tender object of the love of Christ. In it we have also the carrying out, in absolute power, of what were the eternal purposes and counsels of our God. These counsels have been developed in power, so that consequent on the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, we have this wonderful new structure, the Church of God, the Assembly, called also the House of God. This Church is the object of the deep and tender solicitude of the blessed Lord Jesus.

It is a blessed thing to know what the Church is to Christ. I feel utterly incompetent to handle the subject as I would like to, but I count on the Lord's help. The Apostle Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, unfolded the mystery, the truth of the Church as the object of Christ's love and care, because it is His body. He was the “chosen vessel” — a servant of God specially called — to unfold this truth. But his ministry had two sides, for he was “separated unto the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1), as he says, “Whereof I Paul am made a minister” (Col. 1:23), and had to

suffer “for his body’s sake, which is the Church: whereof I am made a minister according to the dispensation of God” (Col. 1:24-25).

If I speak of the gospel, do I merely mean the tidings that would tell a poor sinner how to get rid of his or her sins? By no means! There is the thought of what it is to have the blessed God, in all the magnificence of His love and grace revealed and made known here, to the hearts of men, and they brought to know Himself, and brought into the joy of His own love. All such, so blessed, form the Church. You cannot have the gospel standing alone, and leave out the thought of the Church. And I believe the man who is seeking to do that is doing very poor and unsatisfactory work. No, they are really one. The gospel produces the Church, and the Church is sustained, or enlarged by the gospel.

I think the way in which the gifts are introduced in this fourth of Ephesians is very interesting. Paul was chosen to give out the truth of the Church. With this end in view he carried the gospel to the Gentiles, and the Jews would not permit this, but imprisoned him. It was his very love to souls that impelled him to carry out the gospel.

As a prisoner in bonds he writes this lovely epistle. “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (Eph. 4:1). We do well to heed the Word of God, and see that we walk worthy, for we have been called to this. It is the calling from God. We have been called into association with Christ. We have also been called into a sphere that is absolutely and blessedly divine. Scripture calls it a “heavenly calling.” It is a wonderful calling, and Paul beseeches them to walk worthy of it.

The way so to do is next given: “With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2-3). Now I have been at a good many readings on this chapter, and they have usually taken this shape. First, “What is the calling?” (vs. 1). When that has been discussed has come the query, “What is the unity of the Spirit?” (vs. 3). Why have you left out the second verse? We want the second verse. We never shall touch the meaning of the unity of the Spirit unless our souls are bathed in that which the second verse gives. That is the Spirit of Christ, the grace of Christ, the long-suffering of Christ. And do you think you are going to be a churchman without this second verse encircling you? Do not deceive yourself. You will never touch the truth of the unity of the Spirit, nor be in the power of what that truth is, unless your soul has been really bathed into, yea, dwells in the truth of this second verse.

Lowliness will save you from knocking your head against the lintel of a door that is not high. Do you grasp the figure? And if I am walking in meekness, I shall carry myself rightly when other people are not acting rightly towards me. How beautifully do we find this presented in Scripture as that which marked the Lord Jesus. You and I have to be exhorted to be meek, but the blessed Lord was ever the expression of meekness. He could truly say, “I am meek, and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29). It is sorrowful how soon we can be the reverse. That a saint can resemble Christ in this quality is manifest, for “The man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3).

Perhaps you will say to me, I am surrounded by most difficult people to get on with. Very likely. Do you think they are worse than those who murmured at Moses? If so, there is a fine opportunity for you to show them long-suffering, forbearing one another in love. It is what God’s dear people everywhere need, and what every Christian needs the Lord will give us, if we seek His face.

It is only when the soul is in this spirit that it is able to keep the unity which the Spirit has formed. You cannot make it, and you cannot break it. “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:4-6). The apostle talks of three circles here: the Spirit’s — reality, the Lord’s — profession, and God the Father’s — universal ubiquity. Then he says in the seventh verse, “Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” I apprehend this to mean that to each the Lord gives that grace in the way of gift, which He sees fit to bestow. With regard to our service, we have each an individual gift and place, according to His sovereign will, and infinite wisdom in the choice of His vessels. From Him comes every grace, every gift, but it is for the good of all. This is evident from verse 16.

But notice that it is only by love that we grow, and only by use that we develop what is given to us, in the way of gift. “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16). Mere knowledge puffeth up, but love edifies, and builds up. It is only by the exercise of love that we can build up.

“Wherefore He saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things” (Eph. 4:8-10).

Here you will observe the exercise of the sovereignty of the ascended Head in glory, who communicates a certain gift to you or to me, as He wills. All is His doing. If He has made you an evangelist, or a pastor, or a teacher, or if He has only made you a little help in the Assembly, it is all His doing, it all comes from Him. If you get anything that will help the saints, thank Him and use it. Remember there is something in every one. Do not let us forget that, because we are all here to help each other. “To every one of us is given grace.”

Now, see how beautifully the apostle traces all gift to Christ ascended. He came down, assumed manhood, and absolutely overcame the one who had been the victor over man. At first, in the wilderness, He defeated him morally, and then came out in His own blessed grace to meet captive man, and to deliver him in every way from the bondage of sin (see Matt. 4:23-25). But now He has passed, through death and resurrection, out of this scene, and He has gone on high, and although the powers of the world to come are in abeyance, and miracles have ceased, we are suffered to have a most blessed part in what He is doing now, and He counts upon our hearts to be interested in all that He is interested in.

There are three things in the eighth verse of this chapter. (1) He ascended up on high; (2) He led captivity captive; (3) He gave gifts unto men. When He came into this world He found Satan the captor, and man chained, so to speak, to the wheels of his triumphal car. Man was in captivity, led or driven through the scene by the devil. Now the whole thing is reversed. It is not now that Satan is the captor and man in captivity, but that Christ has been the Victor. He is now risen from the dead, the mighty Victor, and Satan is chained to the wheels of His car. “He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” These are two wonderful things. Satan vanquished, and man delivered, to become Christ’s willing vassal.

He gives the gifts unto men. That is, He makes you the depository of a certain gift, and then He takes you, gift and all, and makes a present of you to His Assembly. He takes up you and me, who have been under Satan's power, He saves us, delivers us, puts our hearts right with God, and brings us nigh to Him. And not only that, but He gives us the Holy Spirit, so that our eternity of gladness is begun here, as we go through this scene, and makes us the depository of some gift by which we are to be the exponents of His grace in this scene He "went about doing good," and we are to walk in His footsteps. That is Christianity, or I do not understand it.

The statement that He ascended up on high is a quotation from the sixty-eighth Psalm, which also says: "The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it. Kings of armies did flee apace: and she that tarried at home divided the spoil. Though ye have lain among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold. When the Almighty scattered kings in it, it was white as snow in Salmon. The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan; an high hill as the hill of Bashan. Why leap ye, ye high hills? this is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the Lord will dwell in it forever. The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea for the rebellious also, that the Lord God dwell among them" (vss. 11-18). "The Lord gave the word," and to us is accorded the immense favor and privilege in this scene, according to our little measure, of holding forth the Word of Life. It is not only a question of preaching. But the saint is a light in this scene of profound darkness. A light that comes from Christ in glory. He will come back, by-and-by, and He will put all things right, and He will not need our help in that day of manifest power, but now, during His absence, He will use us if we yield ourselves to Him.

Was there ever such a Master? Was there ever grace like His?

"Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?" That is the basis of all this unfolding about gift. He has gone right down to the very depths where He overcame Satan, and ascended to God's right hand. His present position and His glory give Him the privilege of making those who were Satan's captives the vessels of His power to deliver others. We follow Him in a holy war against the common enemy of God and man. God fills the whole horizon of the soul here with Christ. Look as deep down as you like, He has been there. Look as high as you like, He is there. Nothing but Christ in victorious power is put before the soul.

And now He unfolds what He gave. "And He gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers" (vs. 11). You have in your English Bible, most probably, a comma (,) before each of these gifts, but it should not be there. I do not think the point in the eleventh verse is that He gave some to be apostles, or to be prophets, but in the knowledge which He had, of that which was necessary to the carrying out of His own purpose, He gave the persons, in whom He had deposited these various gifts, to the Assembly. Now, as to apostles and prophets, we have not those in person here today, nor indeed do we need them. They have been, and have done their work. "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:19-22). The result in full of their work will be seen, by-and-by, in the "holy city, new Jerusalem" (see Rev. 21).

The work of the apostles and prophets was laying the foundation. That, I apprehend, we have in the writings of the New Testament, on which the faith of our souls is now built, and if once the foundation of a house be laid, you do not want any new foundation. The point is this, they are no more wanted. Consequently the idea of there being apostles and prophets now, in their primary sense, is clearly a mistake. We doubtless still have prophetic ministry in the sense of "He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort" (1 Cor. 14:3). Ministry that reaches the conscience, that edifies, or builds up, stirs up, and comforts, is prophetic. The man that can speak in that way is a most useful gift. We all need it. And if there be a prophet here, thank God for it. But mark, he is not a prophet if he do not build you up, stir you up, and bind you up. The prophets of this order are in evidence today when the Assembly is in function, that is, gathered together; but as to apostles, there are none. They have done their work — laid the foundation — and passed off the scene.

But what of apostolic succession? It is a figment of man's mind, and has no trace in Scripture. Successors they have doubtless had, and there are two very solemn scriptures which refer to them. Paul, in addressing the elders of the assembly to whom he wrote the epistle we are considering, thus describes

his successors: "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). The Lord also gave the same Assembly commendation — in the second epistle to them — for having detected impostors. "Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write: These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars" (Rev. 2:1-2). The men, therefore, today, who assume to be either apostles, or their successors, are in a serious case. They are either "grievous wolves" rending the flock of God, or "liars," easily, and surely to be so proved. These scriptures settle the whole question as far as the question of apostolic succession is concerned. Apart from these there is no mention of the subject in God's Word.

But if apostles and prophets have passed away, let us thank God that there are still evangelists, and pastors, and teachers, abiding. Such gifts may not be done without, and the Lord continues to give them right on to the end. So long as the body of Christ is here on earth, so long will He give these gifts. Such, alas, is the confusion in the Church today that each gift may not be doing his work in divine order, and as a consequence, I think the servant of God today has to be a man-of-all-work. That is, he who is an evangelist may have to do a little pastoral work, and seek to teach also, just because all the pastors and teachers are not exercising their respective gifts according to the lines laid down in God's Word.

First let us glance at the pastors and teachers. The teacher is occupied with the Book, the pastor more with the need of the soul. The latter is a very rare gift, while the teacher is a very useful gift. In Ephesians 4:11 you notice they are linked together, in a way quite different from the other gifts. Do you pray for the teachers? We ought to pray greatly for the teachers, but we are apt to forget our privilege in that respect. A pastor loves the saints, gets near them individually, and thus helps and leads them on. You can tell a pastor in a minute, by the way he prays for the sheep.

The pastors and teachers, however, would have little to do were it not for the evangelists. Their position is very blessed, for "How shall they hear without a preacher?" is God's query. He answers it by sending out the preacher (see Rom. 10:14-15).

Let us look at what the Scripture tells us about the evangelist, and notice that this gift comes in between the apostles and prophets on the one hand, and the pastors and teachers on the other. There is a great difference in the work of the evangelist, the pastor, and the teacher. I think I might perhaps put this difference in such a way as the simplest can understand. What is the evangelist occupied with? He is occupied with the soul. What is the pastor occupied with? He is occupied with the sheep. And the teacher? He is occupied with the Book. Men have immortal souls, and what marks an evangelist is intense love to souls. Love for souls should mark every child of God, and if you have it not, is there not grave doubt whether you be one?

Love desires the blessing of others. If you have the enjoyment of the love of God yourself, you cannot be in a right state if you are not solicitous to get others to enjoy it too.

Let me now turn your attention to the Acts of the Apostles. What has greatly interested me lately is the way in which the truth went out in the beginning.

Redemption accomplished, and the blessed Lord gone on high, the Spirit of God came down on the day of Pentecost, and fell upon the hundred and twenty that were gathered together (see Acts 1; 2). Do not forget they were gathered together in prayer when the blessed Spirit of God fell upon them, and the House of God was formed upon earth. The effect of that was that "the multitude came together," and the Spirit of God led Peter to preach, and three thousand men were brought to the Lord that day. It was a beautiful triumph of grace.

The day the Law was broken, do you know what took place? A very different effect was manifest. Moses cried: "Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men" (Ex. 32:26-28). All the sons of Levi came to the help of the Lord that day, and three thousand men died. How beautiful is the contrast on the day of Pentecost. The day the Holy Spirit comes down, Simon the son

of Jonas (was he a Levite?), or Peter, as he is now called, drew his sword — "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" — gave splendid testimony to Christ, and three thousand men were saved and added to the Lord's Assembly that day.

What was Pentecost? It was the inauguration of the Spirit's day. The Holy Spirit was upon the earth. Is He upon the earth still? Yes, you say, but He is not working now as He wrought then. I admit that, but shall we blame Him? Shall we blame God? I think if we turned the eye in it would be better for ourselves. A faithless Church, an Assembly that has lost the sense of what it is to belong to Christ, is sure to hinder His activity. Do not let us forget, however, that we are in the day of the Holy Spirit.

I believe where we are lacking today is in prayer. If you ever traced through the Acts of the Apostles you would be struck with how much prayer comes in. If you read the Gospel by Luke, where you get the lovely history of Jesus, as the dependent Man, you find that blessed One seven times bowed in prayer. Three times seven, and more, the saints are bowed in prayer, in the Acts. The weakness of our day can be easily explained. But we want to be encouraged, and surely what we read of, then, should encourage us.

We have in the Acts the history of a man — and the only man that I know of — who is called in Scripture an evangelist. It was Philip. He was one of those who were selected, if you recollect, to look after the money, and the poor. "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:1-6).

In the seventh chapter of the Acts we get the testimony of Stephen, and for his testimony he loses his life. But how did he die? He died exactly like his Master, praying for his murderers. What did the blessed Lord say, when on the cross? "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). And what does Stephen say? "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60). Beautiful testimony to Christ.

Now the result of this was that persecution broke out, and they were all scattered abroad, and the disciples went everywhere carrying the gospel with them. "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem: and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:1-4). Why does the Lord allow that persecution? I have no doubt He had a divine purpose in allowing it, because you know very well in the end of Luke the Lord had told the assembled company of apostles and disciples, "That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). That is how it is put in the end of Luke.

But when you come to the opening chapter of the Acts of the Apostles you find that they were to wait in Jerusalem till the Holy Spirit came down, and then they were told, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Now what were they doing? The apostles and all the brethren had stuck fast to Jerusalem. They made it a sort of spiritual metropolis. It is amazing how we like to stick to the old place, the old room, instead of going out. There they were, they would not go out of Jerusalem. The Lord says, I will broom them out, by sending persecution. Probably you say, The apostles stuck there still. They did stick still, but I do not think they were obeying the Lord in their action, and He raises up other servants, lesser, as Philip (8:6), or larger, as Paul (chap. 9). If you go far afield you will be obeying the Lord.

A right evangelist always works from the divine center. He works from Christ, and from the thing

that is nearest, and dearest to Christ, and that is the Assembly. Philip was in full touch with the nearest Assembly when he went down to Samaria, and “preached Christ unto them,” as recorded in the eighth chapter. In the end of that chapter the quality of an evangelist is sweetly seen in him. Commanded of the Lord, he leaves the flourishing work at Samaria, and travels one hundred miles to meet a poor anxious soul that had traveled over a thousand to get light from God. He met that poor solitary eunuch, and “preached unto him Jesus.” I do like to hear a brother preaching Jesus. I do not think there are very many that can do it. You need to be very near the Lord to go and preach Jesus. It is easy to talk about Christ. When I was a young Christian I heard more about Jesus than I do nowadays. We have not enough of Jesus about us, nor the grace of Jesus, nor the ways of Jesus. We all of us need a great deal more of Jesus.

Philip caught a great many fish in Samaria, one in the desert, and after he had helped the eunuch he began at “Azotus, and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea” (Acts 8:40). This evangelist therefore preceded Peter in his remarkable mission to Cornelius, and I venture to think had to do with that beautiful work in Caesarea, recorded in Acts 10. In the twenty-first chapter you will find he lived there, and when Paul came thither he stayed with the full-fledged gospel graduate” Philip the evangelist.” “And the next day we that were of Paul’s company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him” (Acts 21:8). The apostles had a greater idea of the evangelist than many people have nowadays.

Evangelists may not always be very intelligent. If this be the case, help them. If I am wrong, put me right. I really want to know the Lord’s mind, and to do it. Possibly Philip needed and desired help; anyway, I am very much struck with the fact that the greatest man that ever lived, save the blessed Lord, when he comes to Caesarea does not go to an hotel, nor to the mansion of the noble centurion Cornelius, but puts up with an evangelist. It would do you good to go and stay with a warm-hearted evangelist.

I have been very much interested lately in considering four things in relation to the gospel: What to preach; where to preach; when to preach; and how to preach. What to preach? Well, you will be interested to see the varied kinds of preaching in those days. It was many-sided. It was beautifully varied. You will find it to be so, if you just take the trouble to see what the preaching was like. But we all have to be like Jonah. The Lord said unto him, “Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee” (Jonah 3:2). Young preacher, preach what God bids you; not what your brethren suggest, or expect, or your hearers like. Get your orders from the top, and stick to them. You must get the right kind of bait if you are going to catch fish. What we want is our hearts enlarged. Oh, for enlargement of heart! That is what we all want, my dear friends. It is a mortal disease physically, but it is the very thing we all want spiritually. A large-hearted saint takes in the purpose of God, the thought of God, and the grace of God, and, in His service proclaims the whole truth of God.

The evangelist’s sphere is the world. He brings Christ to it, and seeks to bring souls out of it to Christ. But, if instructed, he always works from the Assembly, and leads souls into it. You know what a pair of compasses is? An evangelist is like that — or should be. One leg is fixed, and the other you stretch out as far as it will go. Where is the fixed leg of the evangelist? In the Assembly; and his other leg, to use my figure, circles the world. He goes out in burning zeal, and whole-hearted energy to seek souls, wherever God leads him. The world is his parish.

My beloved brethren, let us listen to the Scriptures in this matter: “Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away” (Matt. 13:47-48). When the net was full, they drew it to shore. They work very hard. And mind there is downright hard work connected with the gospel. It is a very easy thing to stay at home, and toast my toes, and say, Thank God, I am going to heaven. But to go out, and labor for the Lord, and get hold of souls, is not so very easy. But they had their recompense. They caught the fish, and “gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.” The vessel is the Assembly. You cannot expect to catch fish in the Assembly. You must go out into the dark waters around to catch them. And what is the water? It is the world, beloved friends.

Everything is in view of the Assembly, and leads to it. But the question arises, Is the evangelist for the Assembly? It is to be noticed that in the list of gifts, which edify it, in 1 Corinthians 12, that of the evangelist is not named. Is this the reason that saints do not need and enjoy the gospel? I trow not. I pity the saint that does not enjoy the gospel. There is nothing I like better than to sit down and listen to the gospel, and we must bear in mind that we live in a day when unestablished souls hover about, and perhaps even get into the Assembly. To all such the simple gospel is divinely suited.

The Lord said to Simon and Andrew, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19); and what I understand by a fisherman is one who catches fish — not merely a man with a rod, or a net, that goes a fishing. The work of the evangelist is to bring souls to Christ first of all, and then to the door of the Assembly. My advice to you is, Do not introduce your own converts. Let the porters take them in. We read of the porters in Solomon’s days. Their names are given in 1 Chronicles 9:17-18; their number, four thousand, in 1 Chronicles 23:5; their courses in 2 Chronicles 8:14; and their service in 2 Chronicles 35:15. Are you a good porter? A few good porters in the Assembly are of great service, because the porters keep out what ought not to be in, and let in those who have a title to go in. It is a great cheer to a young soul when the porters can say, “Come in, thou blessed of the Lord.” I like a good warm-hearted porter.

We have all had our work assigned to us, but let us remember we are all subject to Christ. The evangelist catches the fish, others should determine if they be good or bad. Then what is the relation of the evangelist to the Assembly? Is he under the control of the Assembly? Under the control of the Assembly! What, my servants under your control? My house and my servants belong to me, and not to you. The evangelist is of the Assembly, and, of course, if his walk and ways are not right, he comes under the discipline of the Assembly, but he is the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do I owe allegiance to anybody? Yes! to my Lord and Master, surely to none other. Then as to control? “One is your Master, even Christ” (Matt. 23:8-10). Of course as to doctrine, that is quite another thing. Being of the Assembly, if the evangelist’s doctrine is not sound, he is therein amenable to it. But for the Assembly to think that the evangelist’s business is theirs is a profound mistake. On the other hand, for an evangelist to seek to work in a spirit of independence apart from the Assembly, I should condemn with my whole heart.

If souls are reached by the gospel, what is the natural thing you wish? That they will gravitate to the spot where the Lord is. We might help these dear servants — the evangelists — and we should help them if we prayed more for them. They, however, must be left free to carry out

the exercise of the gift which the Lord has given them, where, when, and how He would lead them. For the Assembly to pray much for them is a very blessed and happy thing.

If any whom I address feel that God has called them to this blessed service, let me affectionately urge you to be devoted. Yield yourself to the Lord. You have only one life, and if the Lord has put it into your heart to preach the gospel, go and do it. Do not preach sermons; be like Philip, preach Christ.

Young men, go out into the country, and tell the people, who perhaps never hear the simple gospel, the story of the love of Christ. Oh, you say, I do preach, but I do not catch any fish — I do not get any conversions. Do not let your mind be occupied with success. The Lord says, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21). He does not say, "Well done, good and successful servant." The great thing is to be simple.

I remember what happened soon after I was converted. I was converted one Lord's Day evening, and at the Lord's Table the next. That was a great favor from the Lord, to put me at once amongst His saints, and I think I may truly say that I have been a Churchman ever since I was converted. Well, after two or three months I began to preach a little out in the country. But some of the saints said, Come and preach in the Room. The Room, of all places! The thought of preaching to these old, intelligent, and possibly critical brethren staggered me greatly. However, I was so pressed by them that I at length consented, and of course got up a most elaborate sermon. Thank God, I broke down in that sermon, which served me right, for I was trusting to my preparation, and not to the Lord. It is the only one I ever broke down in, all the days of my life, for, from that night, I learned to trust the Lord for His support and help when ministering His Word.

If you are going to be a successful fisherman, you will have to keep yourself out of sight. Wait much on God, and remember that men have immortal souls, and are hurrying on to a lost eternity. Then go, and tenderly, lovingly, and beseechingly preach Christ. Tell them of Christ, and, my dear friend, you will be sure of catching men for Him.

The Acts of the Apostles give us great variety in the way of presenting the gospel, and it is very interesting to see the way in which the gospel is connected with the Assembly, and the way in which the work went on. The gospel and the Church were never dissevered in the days of the apostles. The reason of that was their interest in each other's work, and their manifest simplicity. Look at Philip with that beautiful work going on in Samaria, when so many were blessed. Peter and John came down. Do you think that was to examine the work of the evangelist? I do not believe it. The Holy Spirit did not fall upon the converts until they came down. God did not permit that until these men came down, and laid their hands on them. The reason is plain. The work of God is one, although the instruments vary. There was One Head in heaven, and One Spirit on earth, and the work at Samaria was one with that at Jerusalem, for there was but "one body." The apostles' action, therefore, was to show the identification of the work. The Assembly at Jerusalem took deep interest in the work of the evangelist in Samaria.

Doubtless Philip needed, and gladly received the help of the apostles. He thought Simon was converted, but he was not. An evangelist must be a hearty, sanguine man, or he would not succeed. It is part of his gift to be just that. Nothing daunts him. He is like a cork on the water, the more drenching he gets, the higher he floats. He always comes up smiling. He is set in the name of the Lord, and by the grace of the Lord, to win souls for the Lord, and as long as he is here you will find that is what he will do. Preaching is not evangelizing. Many a man likes to preach to a large company, but do you ever find him dealing with souls. Such an one is not of much use. He is perhaps a splendid preacher, but he is not an evangelist. The going down of the apostles, in the case alluded to, was doubtless an expression of sweet and beautiful interest in the evangelist's work.

When Paul was converted, "straightway he preached Jesus in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20), before he got really into the Assembly. He was brought into the Assembly at Jerusalem by the commendation of Barnabas, and the saints soon recognized his worth, as he "spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 9:20-29).

Why did Peter report at Jerusalem the wondrous tidings that "the Gentiles also had received the Word of God"? (Acts 11:1). To share with the Assembly the victories of the gospel. Would that there were more of that kind of thing today, but alas, we are often too self-occupied to be interested in another's work. They were then of one heart, one mind, and one soul. It was not with them the question of this gift or that gift. God was working, and no matter who it was by, all the rest were interested.

See how this is illustrated in the eleventh chapter: "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem; and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord" (Acts 11:19-24).

When the happy tidings of these things came unto the ears of the Church of Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas, all the way to Antioch, a distance of about four hundred miles. They were interested in it. When you hear there is a beautiful work of God going on fifty, or five hundred miles away, do you send some one to see how it is getting on? If you do, mind he must be a good man. The man they sent "was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." That is the kind of man to send. If he is not a man of that sort, he will do a lot of mischief. They sent down that man to help the preachers, and the converts, and when he was come he was made glad, we read. It is a great thing to be always set to help everybody else. Barnabas comes and sees a company of happy saints, and of course he was made glad. A wonderful thing is the grace of God when it works. Why does He not work more in our midst? That is a serious question.

Now come to the thirteenth chapter, and see how the gospel spread from this same Antioch. "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus" (vss. 1-4). Now observe, it was

no work of the Assembly. But the Assembly was allowed to have fellowship with what the Holy Spirit was doing. The Holy Spirit led these servants, but He lets the Assembly have fellowship. Could not you do the same? "And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." I would be very glad if you did that to me. Mark this, no hypocrisy. If I pray, and put my hands upon a man, I am identified with him. If I put my hand on my brother in prayer, I ought next to put my hand into my pocket, to help him, because "the laborer is worthy of his hire" (Luke 10:7). They were identified with these two men, and doubtless sustained them.

In the fourteenth chapter, you find Paul and Barnabas back again at Antioch. When they get there, what do they immediately do? Let us read: "And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: and thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (Acts 14:25-27). They gathered the Church together, and rehearsed all that God had done with them. When you come back from a happy and successful gospel campaign, do you dear evangelists gather the Church together to share the good news? Oh, you say, we should not like to put ourselves forward like that. The saints would not come together for that purpose. I am very sorry for the saints. That is all I can say. If you were to go home and do it, probably some would say, He thinks a great deal of himself. If that be so, at least something else is manifest, the Assembly nowadays has lost its first love for the gospel, and its triumphs. In plain language, we are not so simple as they were in that day. God enlarge our hearts, for we need it.

Pass on now to the fifteenth chapter: "And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren" (vs. 3). There again you have the servants sharing their common joy with the saints, and causing great joy. That is what took place in those early days of freshness and simplicity. I am only telling you what the Lord has recorded, just to stir us all up. And if you are not happy, I am. I know the secret of all this communion in the effects of the gospel. They had all one heart for Christ. They thought only of the glory of Christ. Oh, brethren, the Lord give us to be more in the enjoyment of His love.

I have been greatly struck, too, with the way in which the Lord sought to educate, and then sent out His servants when He was here. "Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth and another reapeth" (John 4:34-37). Oh, what an evangelist He was. Come from the Father's heart, and laden with all its love, He traveled all through that burning desert to reach, and fill one empty, sinful heart. Son of God, we adore Thee I He went to death for you and me. Beloved brethren, what are we going to do for Him? Are not souls perishing on every hand? What are we doing? Are we carrying the light, the blessed gospel of God's grace, to them. Mark, it is a responsibility laid on us. Here the Lord says, LOOK, the fields are white already to harvest. May He press these words upon your hearts and mine.

If we go elsewhere, we find it written: "But when He saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith He unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest" (Matt. 9:36-38). "PRAY YE." Oh, how beautiful! In the fourth of John it was, Look ye; here it is, Pray ye. He, so to speak, says, I will take you into fellowship with Me in the work. I do not know that they did pray, but anyway He sent out twelve: "And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease...These twelve Jesus sent forth" (Matt. 10:1,5). Oh, beloved, the laborers are indeed few. Do we pray after this sort?

In the sixteenth chapter of Mark, we find Him risen from the dead, and there He says in the fifteenth verse, "Go YE into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." That is it. People sometimes say to me, Where shall we preach? He tells you, "Go ye into all the world." I quite admit, if you contend for it, that it was a special injunction to the twelve. But would you limit it to them? We have been noticing that "He gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry; for the edifying of the Body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12). That is to say, He gives in His blessed grace, all that is necessary for the pathway of the saints, and for the carrying out of His work down here, whether in the Assembly, or outside it in the world. "Go ye into all the world," is an imperative command. Have we hearts to obey? Are our hearts so sweetly in tune with Him as to be ready to go.

This answers the question — Where to preach? If I look at the Apostle Paul, I find him preaching in all sorts of places. Hill-tops, river-sides, market-places, prisons, palaces, and synagogues, and his own hired house, all heard his voice. The point is that the servant is to be at the command of the Lord to carry out the testimony. His only exercise was as to how the Lord's word was to be addressed to those to whom his Master had sent him. Nor was it a question of fellowship with the Assembly, though his oft-repeated request for their prayers showed how he valued their fellowship. If their hearts are right, they will be praying to the Lord for blessing.

The servant gets his commission from his Master. He wants no other authorization or commendation. "For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch" (Mark 13:34). He has authority from his Lord: that is enough. What will be the result? There will be a reward for all service rendered to Him by-and-by. The thirty-second chapter of Isaiah gives us a good illustration of the query, Where shall we preach? "Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass" (vs. 20). Sow beside all waters. What is the meaning of that? Diligent toil.

But there is not only the question of where to preach, but when to preach? Solomon furnishes a good answer; "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight: for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth. If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good" (Eccl. 11:1-6). In the East they sow the seed upon the waters, the water

subsides, and the seed drops into a soft fertile bed. This is not preaching. It is you and I just being keen to drop the blessed seed of the Word of God in the soul, wherever God carries us. You are to be a person going about with the heavenly seed-basket on your arm, dropping the seed wherever you go. It may be to a saint. It may be to a sinner. The fact is, far too much is left to the preachers. Verse 4 teaches us not to be governed by circumstances. I think God often gives us a fair wind. It took Paul only a day and a half to come to Philippi from Troas with the gospel (Acts 16:11-12). But it took him five days to get back to Troas again (Acts 20:6). Do you think God has told us that for nothing? God did not put that in His book without purpose.

Go on with your work. Let nothing hinder you. That is the great thing for a saint today. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand." That is when to preach. "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2). Where to preach? All the world your parish. When to do it? Morning and evening, always at it.

How to preach is also of importance, and Scripture tells us how to do it. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psa. 126:5-6). They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. I think that is the How. There is a moral state. There is exercise of soul. And therefore you sow in tears, and reap in joy. That is a beautiful answer to the How, both in the way you go out, and in the way you present the truth.

Again we get an illustration of this in Paul's history. "And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed" (Acts 14:1). Connect that with "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And Paul and Barnabas so spake that a multitude believed. It is said of George Whitefield that he so felt the love of God, on the one hand, and the need of souls on the other, that he often wept over them when preaching. Little wonder that they wept under him. The Lord help you and me to preach like that.

What God looks for is a willing heart. You may be as devoted as you like to be, and will be no more. You may yield all to Christ. There is no must when it is a question of devotion to Christ. I never say to a person, You must be devoted. But I sometimes say, You may be devoted, We all have the opportunity to be such, and it is a fatal mistake if we miss that opportunity.

There is a striking illustration of this in the book of Judges. Some of the people responded splendidly to Barak's call, others held back. This is celebrated in the song of the fifth chapter, which I would ask you to study carefully in relation to the question of being devoted to the Lord. "Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake; utter a song: arise; Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam" (vs. 12.) They were anticipating the fourth chapter of Ephesians even in that day. No longer captives, but set free, a song alone became them. But some had no part in the battle, and no heart for the song, and so, alas! is it today.

"And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. Why abodest thou among the sheep-folds to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Daniel remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea-shore, and abode in his breaches. Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardied their lives unto the death in the high places of the field" (vss. 15-18). Reuben thought it was far better to watch his sheep, than risk their loss, while away on the Lord's business. How is it with us? Are we seeking sovereigns or souls? Which is it? Is it Christ, Christ's people, and Christ's service that I am interested in? And to go wider, do I go out to win others for Him? If you are set to please and serve Him, you will have twice as much joy in your own soul. When we love "to hear the bleatings of the flocks," that is, are commanded by our own interests, our business, our families, our worldly success, and so forth, we spoil our joy and do not often "utter a song." That is, Reuben had a chance of being devoted, and missed it.

Now, this is really very solemn indeed, for if I miss blessing, I am exposed to the reverse. "Curse ye

Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye not the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty" (vs. 23). That is, if I do not respond to God's call, which always leads to blessing, I come experimentally under a curse, a blight.

But, you say, does the Lord want my help? Well, you can take what you like out of that scripture. God keep you from the curse of Meroz. "They came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." Their hearts were not free, and devoted to Christ utterly. Are ours? In His blessed grace He gives us the privilege of being thus His fellow-workers. It is a wonderful privilege to be among His helpers, albeit what we can do is little indeed. I expect to meet Lazarus in heaven. It was a wonderful day for Him when He was raised from the dead. How did it happen? You say, The Lord raised him. Quite true, but did He not say, "Take ye away the stone"? Very likely more than one had a hand in it. What did they do? They helped to push the stone away.

If you can do nothing more, you might be like a little boy whom the Lord had saved. There lived a great, big, and very godless man in the village. This little lad persuaded him to come with him to a gospel meeting. When they reached the door of the meeting room, the little fellow gave him a push in, and said, "Here he is, Jesus, save him!" And the Lord saved that man! It was all the little fellow could do, but he did it. He came "to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

The Lord help you and me to yield ourselves unreservedly to Him. I take my orders from the top, and I recommend you to do the same. If you do, you are sure to be right, you are bound to be right. "He gave to every man his work." Let us each do our own work, and seek only to please Him, till we see Him face to face. Oh, how we shall rejoice to hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" about others, if He cannot say it to us. It will be well, however, to so devote ourselves to Him, that He may have the opportunity to say it even to us.

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