

2 Corinthians - Commentaries by Walter Thomas Prideaux Wolston

Christian Truth: Volume 32, We Know - Language of Faith (5:1-15)

Read 2 Cor. 5:1-15

It is a matter of deepest moment for all of us to be quite sure as to the future. No doubt some will say, It is impossible; no one can be sure as to the future. You will be more right if you say, No one can be sure of the present. You do not know what tomorrow will bring forth; but, thank God, what is unseen and eternal is defined for us with the utmost clearness. The simplest believer knows without a shadow of a doubt.

It is charming how this chapter opens-"We know." What a comfort in a day of doubt, and of infidelity on all sides! What does the Christian know? That if he passes from this scene, he goes to be with the Lord. My reader, do you know this?

In this chapter two most solemn things are spoken of-death and judgment-yet the Apostle can say, "We know that, if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." This is a beautiful possession-the privilege of the veriest babe in Christ-"We know," not "We hope. "

This is the present portion of the believer; it is Christian knowledge, the common property of every child of God, not the possession of some exclusive class. It is that which Christ has secured by His death, bought with His blood, and which He gives to every one of His own.

On the other hand, what is the future of the unconverted man? It is a leap in the dark. What a fool a man must be so to leap when he can get light! Look at the thief on the cross. He could say, I know I am going to be with Christ; He told me Himself-"Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise."

Do you know that, reader? Do not say people cannot know it; be honest, and say, I do not. The world says, You may hope; how are you to know? The Lord tells you in His Word. Would it be presumption to believe Christ? No; presumption lies with the one who says he cannot know, when God's Word says, "Ye may know."

I can look into eternity and say, All is perfectly clear before me. You get the basis and ground on which this knowledge rests in the end of this chapter; it is what Christ has done on the cross. He was made sin-He who knew no sin-that sinners, believing in Him, might be forever with Him without their sins

The Church: What Is It?, Holy Spirit's Temple: the Free Church, The (3:5-7)

John 8:31-32,36; 2 Corinthians 3:5- 7; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 12-14

If there be one thing more than another that marks Christianity, it is that which is brought before us in the words of our Lord in the eighth chapter of John's Gospel, and in the writings of the Spirit of God in 2 Corinthians 3—namely, that the saint of God today is called to freedom, divine freedom, divine liberty; and that is why I say that I believe the Assembly of God is a free Church. There is not the smallest touch of bondage about it, viewed according to Scripture. If you are not yet in the liberty of the Spirit of God, individually and collectively, I hope you soon may be, because, according to Scripture, if you are not free in your soul before God—if you are not standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free (Gal. 5:1), you are not breathing Christian atmosphere.

How simple are the Lord's words to the Jews, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). First of all, the soul, individually, by the reception of the truth revealed in Christ, is set in perfect freedom before God. Freedom from what? Everything that would hinder your heart and soul thoroughly enjoying God. "The servant abideth not in the house forever: but the Son abideth ever" (John 8:35). The servant is in bondage; the Son is in liberty. There is the contrast; and who is the Son? The blessed Lord Himself; and what does He do? The moment He takes you into association with Himself, of course on the ground of death and resurrection, you are in the same atmosphere as He is, and therefore when He says, "the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (vs. 36), He indicates the abiding liberty into which His grace brings us, that we may enjoy the rich portion He shares with us. I like to admit, honestly and openly, that I am a Free Churchman. You say, The Free Church of Scotland? No, nor of any other land; the Free Church of God—of Scripture. I am also a thoroughly Established Churchman; and greatly rejoice further to be a member of the United Church. The Established-United-Free Church is the Church of Scripture, and membership of anything but that is foreign to its teaching. God's Assembly is established, united, and free, and I should be ashamed to own that I was a member of aught else. All Christians are united to Christ and to each other, are in the liberty of sonship before God individually, and are brought by God into the most wonderful liberty collectively, His saints, all together, forming the temple of God. Now see how other scriptures present it.

In Romans 6 the apostle says of believers in Christ, "Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (vs. 18). There is yet sin in the believer, but he is set free from its domination,

He has learned what it is to have died with Christ, and to be alive in Him, in all the freedom of resurrection. This liberty, however, is never known till I have the sense that I am dead with Christ, and also am risen with Him. What is true of Christ, the believer is to apprehend by faith for himself, and take account of as true of himself.

“For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God” (vs. 10). What is that? He has nothing but God before Him. Now for the sequence: “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus” (vs. 1). Is not that liberty? If you do not understand that, I hope you soon will.

Romans 7 tells us of one who is what many are today—full of himself. He speaks of himself forty times, and at length he says, “O wretched man that I am.” He could not be anything else, because he is full of himself. How did he get liberty? “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (vs. 25). “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus: for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:1-2). There is our new place before God in Christ. Who is that true of? Everyone who through faith in Christ and the Spirit’s power can enter into it. There is no use pretending to be free if you are not. But thank God, it is the portion of the feeblest believer. I have had the happy and exhilarating sense of what it is to be connected with Christ, the other side of death, for four and forty years. He is my life, and in Him I have sweetest liberty.

Now go to Galatians, and see how this truth is presented there. I find the apostle saying, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (chap. 5:1). What is that? Getting under law. Nine-tenths of God’s people today are under law as to their standing before God, and in their soul’s relation to Him, hence they are in bondage. Paul urges us not to be entrapped by the yoke of bondage, because law occupies me with myself, and a man that is occupied with himself is bound to be wretched, because there is nothing in him that can answer to God’s claims. You must learn that you are “dead to law by the body of Christ” (Rom. 7:4), and alive unto God, before you can get liberty. A Christian is entitled to know this, hence the apostle says, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1). Liberty—freedom, is what belongs to a Christian; not liberty for the flesh, but emancipation from it, and from all that which kept the soul in bondage, darkness, and distance, so that we might be in the enjoyment of God, even as Christ is.

What a trumpet note of the Spirit to our souls we next hear: “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13). The apostle is so angry with the legalist teachers—the men that put the Christian under law, and consequently into bondage—that he adds, “I would they were even cut off which trouble you” (vs. 12). Paul knew that love effects what law fails to produce, just as the gospel takes you much further than the law. The law says, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” The gospel teaches us to “lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16). For this the believer in Christ has power, by the Holy Spirit; for the gospel gives you life, power, and an object, life in Christ, power by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and then Christ personally as the object for the heart. The law did not give you any of these; the gospel gives you them all. Well may Paul say, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free”—that is, hold firmly the very elements of the Christian calling—and then adds—“only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).

Now look at 2 Corinthians 3, where Paul says, “Our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (vs. 6). If you were under the new covenant in the letter, you would get into bondage again, therefore he says, God “hath made us able ministers of the new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit.” What is the new covenant? The terms of relationship with Himself into which God will enter by-and-by with the house of Israel and the house of Judah according to Jeremiah 31:33-34: “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” Israel will then be fitted for the enjoyment of the reign of Christ; they will have the forgiveness of sins, and the Holy Spirit be in them, but their blessing does not include the sense of sonship and union with Christ. We have all that they will have, and much more; but we are in the enjoyment of the blessings of the new covenant, through the ministry of it, without being under it. We must always remember that all Israel’s blessing by-and-by is on earth, whereas we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ.

We get the spirit of that covenant which is grace. Then we are told, “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (vs. 17). That is the characteristic feature of Christianity—liberty, as there was none under the law, to behold the unveiled glory of God in the face of Christ; and the effect of it is to transform us into the same image, for “we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (vs. 1:8). You get occupied with Christ, as He is revealed in glory. And as you are occupied with Him you become transformed—you become more and more like the One with whom you are occupied. What occupies a person will give color to his character; and if you are occupied with Christ, in the enjoyment of what He is, and where He is, you will take your color from Him, and come back into this world, either individually, or as the Assembly to be here for Christ, and to express Christ in the scene where He is not.

Now if it be true that “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,” we may well ask, Where is the Spirit of the Lord? He dwells in His temple. Turn to 1 Corinthians 6—which is the only place in the New Testament where we have the term, “temple of the Holy Ghost.” The apostle in writing to the saints at Corinth about practical life and holy walk, says, “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” (vs. 19). That is the body of the individual Christian—yours and mine. Every Christian has received the Holy Spirit; a divine Person has come to dwell in his body—which is the blessing promised by the Lord in the gospel. “And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you (collectively), and shall be in you” (individually) (John 14:16-17).

And now this precious truth is applied practically to each individual, as Paul inquires: “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). That blessed truth regarding the individual should lead each believer to be holy in the practical details of daily life, because, wherever we go, we take the Holy Spirit with us. If we go into bad associations, morally or spiritually bad, we take the Spirit with us. Do you think He will manifest Christ to us under these circumstances? No, He will be like the scarlet pimpernel that opens during the day and closes at night. He shuts up, so to speak, ceases to minister Christ to your soul, and you do not feel very happy, because you have grieved Him, and in faithfulness to you, He grieves you. The apostle says, Do not forget “ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your

body." That is the individual side of the Spirit's temple, and now to see the collective we will go back to chapter 3:16.

Addressing the Corinthian Assembly, Paul says, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" The temple is the house of God in its most sacred aspect—the Assembly. God dwells in it by the Spirit—for "ye are the temple of God": hence the terrible sin of defiling it. What is your thought of a temple? No man's house is a temple: God's house is, as occupied by God, and God's Spirit making Him known. We must get hold of the double thought—it is the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells there. It is where His presence may be known, and where His blessed Spirit dwells for that very purpose.

There is a remarkable verse in the Old Testament that connects itself in my mind with this—"In his temple doth every one speak of His glory," or, as the margin translates it, "Every whit of it uttereth His glory" (Psa. 29:9). What is the meaning of that? There is not a thing in His temple, says the Psalmist, that will not utter His glory. You say, If we are that temple then we are here for that object. There is a great truth in that—I commend that verse to you. Study it, pray over it, ponder it; and you will find out that if you have learned what it is to be of God's temple, there is something very grave about it, as every whit of it is to utter His glory. How could that glory be uttered unless His presence be known and enjoyed? The thought is very beautiful—He is in His temple just to make His presence known to His people, that their hearts should turn back to Him in worship, delight, and praise. Our Lord says in Psalm 22, "I will declare thy name unto My brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee" (vs. 22). There, in the Assembly, the blessed Lord, the risen Man, declares the Father's name, and becomes the Leader of the praises of His people.

You will say, that is Psalm 22, but it might not have the peculiar application I have given it. Go, then, to Hebrews 2, and read what is there said regarding His singing in the Assembly. "For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren (vs. 11). Who is he that sanctifieth? Christ; and "they who are sanctified"?—all Christ's, every one that belongs to Him—they "are all of one," of one stock, one set, one place before God as set forth in the risen Man. It is the place that Christ's brethren—the Assembly—have before God; hence it says, "For which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren."

I hope you would not call the Lord Jesus your Brother, not even "Elder Brother." Thomas will teach you better, as you hear him speak on the second Lord's Day, when Jesus was among His disciples. He was not present the first Lord's Day, and he missed a fine meeting. It is a great mistake to miss a meeting with God's people. The next Lord's Day Thomas was present, and the Lord spoke to him. Mark his response: "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). There is a reverence due to that exalted Being, the Lord Jesus Christ, that we must maintain, and that we must ever preserve in our own souls. Of His saints it says, "He is not ashamed to call them brethren"—sometimes we fear He might be, as we think of our life and ways. He is looking at the Assembly, however, as that which He has redeemed by His atoning sufferings and blood-shedding; He has presented it to God, and "He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare Thy name unto My brethren; in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee." Wonderful, indeed, is it to hear Him sing praise. How does He do it? Do you not understand? Then you have missed the great point of Christianity if you have not got this. To be, here on earth, in His Assembly, where you have His presence, hear His voice, and are conscious of His leadership, as He is leading the praise, is wonderfully blessed—every whit of that temple is to be vocal with God's glory, and the risen Man leads it.

You say, I thought we should get that by-and-by, when we get to heaven. Yes, but we are also to have it down here. How are we to get it, you say? Well, that is the question; the Spirit of God alone can lead us into it. Now look at the temple, and see how the Spirit of God works in the Assembly. The temple is connected with worship, and where can I get worship? Only in the midst of God's people, who form that temple. I meet a crowd today in the street hurrying along. I know some of them and I say, Where are you going? "Oh, to church." What for? "Dr. So-and-So is going to preach." And do you call that worship? Oh no, that is not worship, that is ministry, quite right in its place, but ministry is not worship. There is tremendous confusion in the minds of Christians about these matters. You may say, "What are you doing this afternoon? You are speaking on God's Word." True, but I am only exercising any little gift God has given me for the good of His people, or those not yet converted if such be here—but this is not a worship meeting, nor is it the Assembly. The Assembly, in function, consists only of the Lord's people, born of His Spirit, and indwelt of His Spirit, gathered together in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, confessing the blessed truth that there is one Body, and when so gathered, subject to the guidance and control of His Spirit. The chief object of the Assembly when so gathered is the Lord's Supper—the showing of His death, which leads to praise and worship of the highest kind.

What is the difference between ministry and worship? Worship goes up to God, and ministry comes down from God. If you come and hear me speak, and get a little help, thank God; but that is ministry, not worship—it comes from God to you, though He may use a human vessel. But worship is what we read of in John 4, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water...Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well (fountain) of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:10,13-14). That is what the Lord says to the poor Samaritan woman. It is to her He also says, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24).

Do you know what the Lord Jesus did and is doing? He came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He is still ranging the world to find sinners to save them. The Father is seeking worshippers, and it is only His children that can be such. You cannot get worship from the world, it knows Him not. Pharaoh wanted to get the Israelites to put up their altar in Egypt. No, said Moses; and he was quite right. The world is a scene under judgment. We, like Israel, must go three days' journey into the wilderness, so to speak, before we can hold a feast unto the Lord. There must be downright separation from this scene, and that is what Christianity is. You are brought by the death and resurrection of Christ out of this scene, into relationship with Christ, and you find yourself in the company of the risen Man. He is the Leader of the worship of God's Assembly, and none but God's people are there.

What about the world? It is outside. What are you going to do with them? Leave them alone while we worship; they cannot worship. Worship is the overflow of a full heart—the outflow of a heart that enjoys God; but the man of the world does not know Him. I would leave them alone very severely so far as worship is concerned, for they know nothing about it. But on the other hand, when not engaged in the worship of God with our fellow-saints, we should seek to be in season, and out of season, carrying the blessed gospel of God to them. Then when they have believed and received the gospel and also the Holy Spirit to dwell within them, we should like to see them in the bosom of God's Assembly,

and will heartily say, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without?" (Gen. 24:31). But as long, my hearer, as you are unconverted, you are really outside, you have no place in God's Assembly, for of you it is as true as of Simon, you have "neither part nor lot in this matter." That is drawing a very hard and fast line, you say. I did not draw it, I did not write the Scriptures. You see how God writes, and what He says. People have such strange notions in their heads about "the Church." They must all "join the Church"—whether converted and saved is often a question not raised—and they go in troops, and God's people are thus swamped and spiritually hindered, if not actually buried in Christendom's systems, which avowedly admit believers and unbelievers to similar privileges—such as the Lord's Supper. True spiritual worship under those circumstances is an impossibility.

Now let us look at 1 Corinthians 12 and its connection with chapters 13 and 14. You will remember that Paul wrote to Timothy, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). The spirit of power is seen in 1 Corinthians 12—the Holy Spirit; the spirit of love is found in chapter 13—the spirit of Christ; and the spirit of a sound mind is what marks chapter 14. Study these three chapters, and you will find it to be so. The persons who possess the gifts of the twelfth chapter must be imbued with the spirit of the thirteenth, or they will be of no use in the fourteenth, where you have the Assembly in function. What do you mean by that, you ask? Well, the British Parliament exists, though it is not sitting today while I speak. All the members are away in the country; but presently they will return, assemble at Westminster, and that will be Parliament in function. That really is chapter 14, and there we learn how God's Assembly is to be conducted. Chapter 12 shows us all that the Spirit is to the Assembly. The gifts are manifestations of the energy of the Spirit committed to men, and we read that "there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are diversities of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all" (vss. 4-6). This is not exactly an exposition of the Trinity, but you have the Spirit, the Lord Jesus, and God, all in relation to the Assembly—the Assembly here on earth—acting in and through the gifts.

"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (vs. 7). Whatever the Holy Spirit has given to any individual member of the Assembly is not for himself, it is for all the rest, for the profit of everybody else. "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; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (vss. 8-11). It is the sovereign will of the Holy Spirit that distributes these various gifts in power, for the good and blessing of the Assembly. Where He works, it is God who works, but the Spirit is thus presented personally acting on earth as He wills, and His operations in men are gifts distributed according to His will.

That is the way God started the Assembly down here, and the variety presented is most interesting. Spiritual power was very diversified, and the most striking feature of this chapter is the fact that all these various and most useful manifestations were not placed in one man, but by the same Spirit divided to every man severally as He willed, the complete antithesis to the usual ministry of Christendom's churches.

I pity the minister of the present moment, for he is supposed to have every possible gift vested in him. He must preach and exhort, teach the believers, convert the unbelievers, dispense the sacraments, visit the sick, bury the dead, be pastor, teacher, and evangelist all in one, and finally lead the congregation in worship—a goodly charge indeed. Christendom demands this, and gets plenty to take upon themselves this responsibility. In fact, generally speaking, people are not happy unless they can find a man to their mind who will take charge of the whole concern. But that is not what Scripture teaches; and whether the plan—which is not Divine—really leads to true Divine worship, whether it works out well, and leads to spiritual life and progress, the saints being well fed, while sinners are manifestly saved, you must judge. But I think it is rather like King David's new cart that carried God's Ark in the wrong way. He got into trouble over that, and was the cause of a man's death. Then David halted, read his Bible for three months, and got a lot of light. Of that more farther on.

Now God has given us His way for His Assembly, and it is very simple; it is by one Spirit dividing to every man severally as He will. Do you not think there is all that God knows is necessary for His Assembly in it today? Yes, it is there, but much is not in use, many gifted men are, practically speaking, buried in the systems I have alluded to, and are consequently not in the exercise of the gift they have received.

The order and importance of the various gifts we may now glance at. "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" (vs. 28). Gifts were to be estimated according to the measure in which they served to really edify the Assembly. Some were more excellent than others, and should be earnestly coveted. Why are tongues put last? The Corinthians were proud of them, and put them first—they thought if a man could stand up and talk in a foreign language, it was wonderful. They possessed these sign-gifts, and used them like children with a new toy—showed them off—and the Assembly was being turned into a kind of Babel, because they were using these gifts quite out of place. The sign-gifts were to testify to people outside. "Tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not; but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe" (chap. 14:22). The possessor of a spiritual gift was a man honored of God, for he ministered to God's people, and this explains the exhortation—"but covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet show I unto you a more excellent way" (chap. 12:31). I wish I saw the saints, young and old, more covetous of that which would help them to minister the things of the Lord to the people of the Lord.

Chapter 13 opens with a statement that all preachers should remember. Here is God's word to us. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (vs. 1). Love is what God is, and if I have it not, I am not born of God so as to partake of His nature. God's love is its own motive, and, in us, participation in the Divine nature is the alone source of love, which will sustain us in all difficulties. Let us never forget that love is God's nature, and we are to represent Him on earth. You say, I have no gift. Possibly so, but you can love. That every Christian can do, and it is more valuable than the brightest gift, because love is the nature of God, and seeks the blessing of others—it thinks of everybody but itself. What is said of love in chapter xiii. is really the reproduction of the divine nature. It is the life of Jesus, and love abides forever.

In chapter 12 we have had the gifts, and in chapter 13 we have love unfolded to us, the spirit in which they must be exercised if they are going to be useful in chapter 14. Long ago I used to wonder why chapter 13 came in there. I understand now, there is no use in any gift unless it is exercised in the spirit of love—love that seeks the profit of others. In chapter xiv. you have the Assembly receiving God's

instructions, as to what was to obtain in its midst when in function, that is, when gathered together, so that God might have what He desires out of His people so assembled. First we are told to “follow after love, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, 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” (vss. 1-3). Are there any prophets now? Not in the sense of those who bring out the mind of God for the first time, who were connected with the apostles at the foundation (Eph. 2:20). But there are yet men who are prophets in the sense of verse 3, whom the Spirit can use to speak after this manner, for edification, exhortation, and comfort—men whose ministry brings you into the presence of God, builds you up, stirs you up, and binds you up. Such ministry is invaluable; it is the richest gift. There are many who are anxious to be built up, and if you get good out of ministry, and feel you have been built up in the truth of Christ, that is edification. Then there is exhortation. I like a prophetic brother who stirs me up. He touches my conscience, and brings me into God’s presence, as to my practical ways. His ministry is very valuable to God’s people. Then there is the comfort, the binding up. There are, in God’s Assembly, such prophets today, though they may not all be exercising their gifts—that is another thing.

Now observe that the thought of what will profit the Assembly is always before the apostle’s mind in this chapter. Edification is to be the ruling principle. “I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying” (vs. 5). The keynote of God’s Assembly is what will profit, what will help. If ministry is profitable, all right; if not, it is not to be allowed, it is condemned by the Spirit of God. The Assembly will soon know what profits it; and if my ministry is not profitable, the kindest thing my brethren can do is to tell me so. It is waste of time for any of us to go on with that which does not profit. You might not be able to say much, but if God’s Spirit gives you anything to say to His Assembly, say it, you have that liberty in God’s free Church, and the “five words” might help greatly (see vs. 19).

But an unknown tongue could profit no one, and accordingly we read, “Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful” (vss. 13-14). I must know what to pray about, and pray so that others may understand me, i.e., in a language they understand, and audibly to boot. I said to a brother once, “I never say Amen to your prayers.” He said, “Do you not? Why not?” “Because I never hear what you say,” I replied. He was a mumbler. There should be no such in public. The point is what is profitable. If a man prays till you are fairly worn out by it, that is not for profit. The essence of a good prayer meeting is simplicity, audibility, and brevity. Long prayers in public are only spoken of in Scripture with condemnation. Prayer in your own closet, with shut doors, may be as long as you like, and our Lord said will be rewarded (see Matt. 6:6).

In the Assembly the Spirit should control every motion. “What is it then? 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” (vs. 15). God’s Assembly is marked by prayer—the expression of dependence—and singing, which is the outlet of the heart’s joy. Some people think it is not spiritual to sing—I do not think they have the Spirit’s mind. Paul says, “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 thy giving of thanks seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?” (vs. 16) Here is worship; blessing and giving of thanks. What a lovely picture of the Assembly in function. It is marked by ministry that profits, and prayer, singing, and worship. That is what God’s Assembly is put together for, to turn to Him in prayer, song, and worship. It is the New Testament analogue of Psalm 29:9, “Every whit of it uttereth thy glory.”

Worship is a most important function of God’s Assembly. But what is worship? It is not thanksgiving—it is more. Thanksgiving is gratitude and blessing for what God has given; but worship is the delight of the heart in what He is. It is the soul finding its delight in God—its rest in the revelation of Himself, in Christ. It is not merely gratitude for blessings conferred, for what you have got, though that be not forgotten, but your soul is delighting in Himself, and that is what God looks for. One saint expresses it for all the rest, and the Assembly says Amen. In what takes place in the Assembly God likes warmth and fervency, and if a brother prays to, or worships God, one likes to hear a hearty Amen. There will be a worship meeting by-and-by, in which the Assembly will take part, and hear an Amen that will reverberate through creation. “And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever. And the four living creatures said, Amen” (Rev. 5:13-14). There is a deep diapason note in that Amen. Sometimes brothers pray and lead in worship, yet there is not a sound at the end. I believe if the heart is right there will go out an Amen, a so be it. You are putting your seal upon that which the Spirit of God elicits, and God looks for that.

But now as to ministry in the Assembly. We get very distinct instructions as to what is, and what is not to obtain. Paul felt the importance of only acting in a way that ensured profit to others. “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. Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men” (vss. 18-20). We ought to understand and obey the Assembly instructions which, in His wisdom and love, our God has here given us, for this chapter is very important, as you will see. “In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that they will not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe” (vss. 21-22).

Sign gifts were only for the beginning, but prophecy always goes on, and here we have the final and fullest directions for the conduct of God’s Assembly when coming together. “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?” Mark those words—“the whole Assembly.” Here was God’s Assembly in one place. You may say, you cannot get that now. If I could not get the whole I would seek to be one of those that would act on the truth that should bind the whole, if they were subject to God’s Word. All were supposed to be there, and gathered in this way. If all spoke with tongues the unlearned would be disgusted. “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. 24-25). Detected and exposed by the prophetic ministry, the man’s heart is reached, He worships God. He has proved that God had a temple at Corinth, and met God in His temple there. If we all walked in the truth of this, and were so gathered today, a worldly man coming in would find such power that he would say, “There were a lot of Christians there, but God was there too.”

But the Assembly at Corinth, though they thus gathered, were uninstructed, hence Paul asks, "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" (vs. 26). They were all too active at Corinth; but that was the way the Assembly met, with freedom and liberty for everyone to take part. How to take part with profit is taught here. And now we get plain instructions. "If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course (that is, separately); and let one interpret" (vs. 27). How simple. "If any man speak," that is open enough, free enough surely. Is that the way things are conducted in the church to which you go? You say, We do not allow that. Why not? Here is God's word for His Assembly. Here are His instructions for you and me, for this epistle is written to us, as much as to the Corinthians; and God says "if any man speak." It is to be only two or three, not more, and not all together.

"But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God" (vs. 28). If what he has got to say cannot be made understandable to others, it is of no use—it is excluded. "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge" (vs. 29). Not to permit this when the Assembly is gathered together is to quench the Spirit. That is as clear as daylight from another scripture, where the apostle says, "Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:20-21). To despise or hinder the freedom of the prophets is to quench the Spirit. Solemn reflection. I could not, and would not, recognize anything as the Assembly of God where this liberty of the Spirit of God to use any member of the Assembly He willed was not maintained inviolate; nor should you; to do so is going clean in the teeth of God's Word. We are not supposed to swallow, but we are told to judge what everyone says, and I do not expect you to lightly swallow what I say, but God's injunction as to the liberty for two or three to speak we must each of us heed, if we are to please Him and keep a good conscience. Whoever speaks must do so as "the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11). That is his responsibility, ours is to "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good." We are bound to judge of what is spoken, not critically, but so as to know what is right, and not to sanction what is wrong.

And then we are told—"If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace" (vs. 30). A prophet might be speaking, and another sitting by get a revelation; if he get up, the first must hold his peace. If the Spirit of God in energy raises a second, the first must sit down. You say, There would be all sorts of confusion in the Assembly if this were allowed. I beg your pardon, the confusion is when it is not allowed, for God is disobeyed. He has said, "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. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (vss. 31-33).

These instructions, I repeat, were not merely for Corinth but for every Assembly in every place (see 1 Cor. 1:2). These directions are binding upon you and me today; and all I say is, if you are sanctioning what is in the teeth of this, you are assuming a very grave responsibility in your pathway as a child of God. The existing arrangements in the Churches of Christendom are distinctly in opposition to what we are told here. Supposing the Apostle Paul came into this city this morning, and found himself at the service of one of these Churches, could he get up to speak? You say, That could not be; it is all arranged beforehand. Yes; and that is where the departure from God's Word is so apparent, and the results so sad. The existing arrangements of man absolutely do what Paul told the Thessalonian Assembly not to do: "Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings." To despise the latter—refusing them—is to quench the former. The world "resists" the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51), the individual may "grieve" Him (Eph. 4:30), but the Assembly, as such, can "quench" Him by refusal to heed what He may say through a prophet of His own selection. That is easily and now universally done by pre-arranging all, and putting all into the hands of one or two, who shall preside over the Assembly, to the exclusion of the Spirit's free action by any member thereof that He may will to use for the profit of all the rest. Those who sanction and accept this clerical position incur a fearful responsibility regarding the rights of the Holy Spirit, which the youngest saint can see are thus ruthlessly infringed and disregarded. The greatest sin of Christendom is the way the Holy Spirit has been treated in what calls itself the Church.

You know where you are today—are you walking on the lines laid down in 1 Corinthians 14? You say, No. Well, you will have to ponder this scripture, and one thing that should awaken your inquiry in the matter is the injunction, "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" (vs. 34). What use was it to bid women be quiet in the Assembly, if all the men might not speak? You know that in the Churches everywhere today women and men too are kept silent. Everything is, as I have previously said, supposed to be wrapped up in the person of one man or two—everybody else is to be quiet. God says, "Ye may all prophesy, one by one." The only restriction was upon the women—"Let your women keep silence." Christendom says, Ye may not speak, save the one we have authorized to speak. And you call that the Church! It is man's, not God's Assembly.

The apostle saw that the Corinthians then—as well as many today—would not like these instructions, so then he says, "What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?" (vs. 36). That means, Are you to teach me? or am I to teach you? or are these instructions meant only for you? Not at all, they are God's plain directions for every Assembly—the whole Assembly of God, world-wide, is bound—when come together—to follow the directions of this chapter, or they will find out by-and-by, in the day of the Lord, that they have made a mistake, as to Church order, all along the line down here, and have built up that which has not God's sanction.

The gravity of these instructions is intensified deeply by the apostle's next word: "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (vs. 37). We all like to think ourselves spiritual. Now, fellow-Christians, you must face this, every one of you—"the commandments of the Lord" must not be despised. You cannot treat them lightly, and if you have not treated them rightly before, I hope God will give you grace to do so from this time forth. I know some will say, All that was for early days, and did then, but it is not practicable now. That is sheer unbelief, and audacity to boot. God has spoken, our place is to obey, not to tell Him that we are wiser than He, and know how to arrange matters in His House better than He knew Himself.

In God's House every arrangement must be of God, not of man. We should enter the Assembly with the sense that God will order, arrange, and take care of Christ's glory better than we can by any arrangement of man's suggesting. Everything in the Assembly of God must be left to the action and guidance of the Spirit of God, who dwells in the bosom of that Assembly. By making creeds and confessions to begin with, and then rules and regulations as to the conduct of the Assembly, you are trenching on the domain and liberty of the Holy Spirit. It is a noticeable thing that Christendom's creeds and confessions are marked by the omission of any adequate testimony to the personal presence in the Assembly of the Spirit of God. I do not say that it is denied; but the truth of His personal presence, as dwelling in the House of God, and also in the individual believer, for all that relates to the order of the former, and the comfort of the latter, is conspicuous by its absence. The kernel truth of Christianity is little in evidence.

Again the arrangements for the so-called worship of God are made after a sort that render men independent of the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is left out as though He were not here at all. A formula takes the place of the unhindered action of the Spirit in some quarters, and the intervention of men—appointed by man—obtains in others. In all this the Church has departed from the truth, and not listened to the words of her Lord. It is with deep sadness I say these things, but I dare not shrink from uttering the truth in respect of this, for the blessing and growth in grace of God's dear children so depend on this grave matter. It is in direct ratio as we give the Holy Spirit His right place in our lives individually, and in the Assembly collectively, that we advance spiritually.

But many will say, If you do not have things arranged beforehand there will be sure to be confusion. Leave God out, and there will be. Let Him have His place, and there will be none. I will ask you a simple question. Who orders matters in your house? You or your servants? "Of course I order my own household," is your reply. Good. The Assembly is God's House. Can He not keep order in it better than we? Surely. Let us have faith in the real ever-abiding presence of the Spirit of God. The presence of that Spirit is a real thing, and if only there be two or three today who are prepared to own the truth of the Body of Christ and the habitation of God, as they gather together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, there will He be, and the ever-faithful Spirit will deeply bless such. God always honors faith, and we shall do well to remember that God's arrangements are ever better than man's. Further, we must not forget that these injunctions in 1 Corinthians 14 are the Lord's Commandments, and long ago He said, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

"But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant" (vs. 38), is small comfort to all such. If any are ignorant that Paul wrote with God's authority in this matter, it is ignorance indeed; let such be bound in their ignorance. The simple and spiritual will be delivered. Anyone filled with the Spirit will own that what Paul here gives us, is the expression of God's wisdom, and came from Him to His Assembly for its blessing. The conclusion of it all is this, "Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues" (vs. 39). We must not have any manmade rules in God's Assembly, to check His Spirit, or lessen the activity of His Spirit; and the great sin of Christendom, I repeat, has been the quenching of the Holy Spirit, by introducing rules and regulations as to the Assembly clean contrary to the Lord's commandments here given.

"Let all things be done decently and in order" (vs. 40) is a very lovely word for our hearts to heed. It is like an inscription that runs right round the inside of a building. In chapter 3 the Assembly of God is presented under the figure of a temple. As I draw near, and am going up the steps, I see written over the portico, "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness" (1 Cor. 3:19). That is God saying to us, If you come in here, you will be found out. I go inside, and I see a beautiful golden belt running all round the building, and inscribed on it, "Let all things be done decently and in order." And what is the Divine order? The order that comes in chapters 12 and 14. Whether you and I are walking in the due order is the question each must answer for himself before the Lord. He who is so walking will agree with me that God's Assembly is indeed THE FREE CHURCH of Scripture.

The Church: What Is It?, Established and Endowed (1:21-22)

Acts 20:28-36; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; 28-31; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22

It is abundantly plain in Scripture that God's Assembly is both established and endowed. If anybody asks me whether I belong to the "Established Church," I always say "Yes," most emphatically. If they ask me "Which?" I say simply "God's"—every other I disown, because I do not find it in Scripture. I could not be a member of anything which is not God's Assembly, for, being a member of it, I cannot, in simple subjection to the truth, acknowledge any other membership. To be of it is enough. God's Assembly He has established, and established well, I hope to show from Scripture, and likewise that it is endowed, marvelously endowed, for its endowment is the Holy Spirit—not money.

Now it is noticeable that the Apostle Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, addresses both his epistles to "the church of God which is at Corinth." You may not, however, have observed that the address of the first epistle is to you and me. Read it: "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (1 Cor. 1:1-2). So that, if you call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, you see this epistle has its application, and is directed to you as much as to the Corinthians. What God has taught us in this epistle is therefore as binding upon our consciences and hearts as on the first company that received it.

They were called "the assembly of God." There is no other local company of saints in all the New Testament which is so addressed, or to whom an epistle comes with this inscription. In the second epistle a similar address is found: it is, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia." The latter were, for special reasons, embraced by the ministry to be found in the second epistle. I think this manner of address is very important, because this epistle came to "God's Assembly" in that city, and that Assembly included every saint in Corinth. Now if a letter came addressed "To the Assembly of God in Edinburgh," I fear that the postal officials would have some difficulty in knowing where to deliver it. They might say, Oh, well, give it to such a Church. But I should say, No, that will not do, that is not the Church. And if they said, Then will you take it? I should say, Oh dear no—I and those with whom I am in happy fellowship—we are not the Church of God. I trust we are of it, and seeking to walk according to its plainly written instructions in Scripture, but we are not it.

What is the Church of God in Edinburgh? All the saints in Edinburgh—they are the Assembly of God in Edinburgh today. In that day at Corinth the saints were united, and all together, instead of being, as, alas, saints are today, divided. The postman at Corinth had not a bit of difficulty—the bearer of these letters would soon find the Assembly of God. If he asked for them he might be told, It is those queer people, who meet by themselves—keep themselves out of the world, and are a separate, holy company. Would that we all were that today, for then the people of God would have much more power in dealing with the world, in God's interests, than is now the case, the existence of an "Established Church" notwithstanding.

Now I am not concerned with what men have established—I am not at all careful about that; but I want to inquire from Scripture what God has established, and the verses I read in 2 Corinthians carry the answer: “Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Cor. 1:21-22). You have there the principle of establishment and endowment. The apostle reminds the Corinthians that God had something here that He had established. It had nothing to do with the world, or with this scene, where men have their interests and occupations. It is what God has called His Church—“The church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood [or, with the blood of His own]” (Acts 20:28).

Do you know what the world did with God’s Son? It did not know Him; spat in His face; crowned Him with thorns; nailed Him to a tree, and slew Him; and there is the end of the Son of God as far as the world’s present attitude towards Him is concerned. You say, That is giving the world a very serious character. Yes, and there is an immense breach between God and the world today, because of its treatment of His blessed Son. And that is why the apostle says: “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory; which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:7-8). If they had known who the Lord of glory was, they would not have crucified Him; but they have done it, and there is a breach between the world and God; consequently, the moment the world’s hand appears in matters relating to God’s Assembly, I do not say it is a sad day for the world, but it is a sad day for the Assembly, for it shows that it has fallen under the influence and power of the world.

When the world cast out God’s Son, a new structure came in view; it was God’s Assembly, which He had bought with the blood of His own. It was something very precious to God; it had cost Him the life-blood of His own dear Son. That blessed Son had come Himself to redeem and bring that Church out of the world to God, as the apostle puts it in another epistle: “Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world” (Gal. 1:4). God looked to have something here in this world, that was peculiarly His own, and separate from the world. And why was it left in the world? To let the world know what the character of God was, whose Son it had cast out. The Church is to be morally the continuation of Christ, characteristically. “For to me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21), said Paul. The life of Jesus is to be repeated in the lives of His people (see 2 Cor. 4:10-11). The world is to learn the nature of God through His Assembly. If this is to be, He will need to establish it—not the world.

This is exactly what 2 Corinthians 1:21 presents. First of all you have the establishing, and what is that for? I do not doubt it is for power. The moment the saints have the sense of being stablished in Christ by God, and of thus being sustained by God, there is power, since all is by the Holy Spirit, to walk in this scene for God.

Further, He has “anointed” us. What will that give us? Divine intelligence. Intelligence is always connected with the anointing. “But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him” (1 John 2:27), that is, they were intelligent. Where does this intelligence come from? Not from the human mind, which can contribute nothing in divine things, but from the Spirit of God, that has anointed every believer. And then we further read: “Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Cor. 1:22). There you get two other thoughts—the seal and the earnest. Everybody knows the meaning of a seal—it gives the thought of security, and it is a mark of identification, while the earnest of the Spirit is connected with the enjoyment of all that is ours even now. The individual sealed with the Spirit, and having the earnest of the Spirit, is secure and joyful. We are then established, anointed, sealed, and have the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts; hence power, intelligence, security, and enjoyment mark God’s Assembly. It really wants nothing else. Show me the assembly that has all this in their souls, and they will want nothing else—they could not be contributed to, for blessing, by anything which has its spring in man’s mind. Nay, the more man is in evidence the less will there be of God.

We read a good deal in Scripture of individuals and of the Church being established. To see this we will go back to Paul’s history, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Before his conversion he had been bitterly opposed to the Assembly of God, and had wrought terrible havoc in it. He was at the bottom of the slaying of Stephen, consented to and witnessed his death, and then went on his mad career to Damascus, to wipe the name of Jesus off the earth. He was the terror of the Assembly. But God did then what He loves to do now—He stepped in, and converted the foremost opponent, and the “chosen vessel,” an apostle of Satanic hate one moment, became an apostle of Christ the next. A wonderful transformation was that, very like the figure given us in Jeremiah 18:2-6, where the potter wrought the shapeless clay. First the vessel was in the mind of the potter, then he wrought on the wheel and formed the vessel, and then the mind of the potter was in the vessel. From eternity there had been a purpose in the mind of God regarding Saul, and now He picks him up and converts him—his will is broken, and from that moment he becomes a most blessed servant of Christ. Before, the vessel was in the mind of the great Potter; and now the mind, and thought, and purpose of God are in that “chosen vessel,” and he carried them to the Assembly.

After Saul’s conversion we read: “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified” (Acts 9:31). Why rest? Because Paul was converted, and his conversion marked an epoch. It only shows what that man’s power was. Before his conversion ceaseless persecution afflicted the saints. Then, converted by God and brought into the Assembly, the Church had rest. How much may result from one conversion!

The work of God goes on, and here and there individual companies spring up; all of one kind, of one stamp, each an integral part of the one Assembly, which the Holy Spirit had formed on the day of Pentecost; but they need establishing, and Paul goes round confirming the disciples (see Acts 14:22; 15:41). In Acts 16 he goes out again, after the great congress at Jerusalem, because he had the sense of the liberty of Christ, and he was very desirous of teaching the disciples to walk in that liberty. Judaizing teachers were dogging his steps, and saying to the Gentile converts, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). Hence the congress at Jerusalem, from which came a letter containing instructions as to what the Assembly should do; and Paul and Barnabas were the messengers, accompanied by Judas and Silas. “And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily” (Acts 16:4,5). There we get the first thought of establishment in relation to the Church, and what is it? Worldly support? Far be the thought! It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit through this beloved apostle and his fellow-workers. It is the ministry of the truth that makes people free—takes them out from under law, puts them in liberty, and the sense of “the true grace of God wherein ye stand” (1 Peter 5:12). The Greek word for “establish” means “to make stable, or strong”—that is real establishment. It is divine support, and divine ministry, though coming through human lips.

Now I will take two other verses where the word comes in. "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established" (Rom. 1:11). What is establishment there? Spiritual gift—which leads to divine ministry of the Word—nothing else. You may depend upon it, in any measure in which the world touches the Church of God, it is not established, but dis-established—the faith of God's people in Himself, as the alone source of good, is undermined, for they are thereby taught to rest upon an arm of flesh, and not upon the Lord. Truly said the prophet: "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited" (Jer. 17:5-6). The heath in the desert is the driest thing out; and you must of necessity get a fruitless, sapless condition of spiritual life, usually called "Moderatism," in every Assembly where the things of God are allowed to be mixed up with, supported by, or are in any way tampered with by the world, that is at enmity with God.

Now turn to the very first epistle penned by Paul—that to the Thessalonians. These dear young saints a little while ago were heathen. They were converted through the apostle's ministry. There was a great deal of opposition in Thessalonica, so that Paul had to leave it, of which we read in Acts 17, as also of his going to Berea. Of his hearers there we are told: "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (vs. 11). I want you to be Bereans—men that search the Scriptures. What I say, or any other man says, is of no value—it has no weight or authority—unless it be supported by Scripture. You go to God, and God's Word, the Scriptures, and get your light—as I seek to get mine—alone from Scripture, the only source of light on divine things, whether the Church or aught else. And if I am wrong—put me right. I want the truth, because truth is above everything.

To these young Thessalonian believers, undergoing much persecution, the apostle wrote: "Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; and sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow-laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith" (1 Thess. 3:1-2). What is it that really establishes people? The ministry of the truth. Timothy was a very remarkable young man, though perhaps a little timid, hence the apostle says, "Let no man despise thy youth" (1 Tim. 4:12). Some were inclined to snub him, and throw cold water on him—a thing not unknown in the twentieth century on the part of venerable seniors towards their younger brethren—a practice not to be commended, however. Do you know what the apostle says regarding Timothy? "I have no man like-minded who will naturally care for your state" (Phil. 2:20). He was a very devoted young man, though he needed possibly a little exhortation and encouragement, which Paul gave to him, in the two epistles addressed to him. The Assembly of God today would be all the better of a legion of Timothys, for the Thessalonians were much established by the visit alluded to (see 1 Thess. 3:6-8).

Establishment, then, is by the ministry of divine truth, that builds the soul up in the knowledge of Christ. To this the Apostle Peter agrees as he says, "The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you" (1 Peter 5:10). And again: "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:5-7,12). I recommend you strongly to belong to the establishment—to be an established Christian in the sense in which Scripture uses the word.

But now you will say to me, That does not touch the question of what people call "establishment," or "the Established Church," that is, a national, religious institution, which the worldly civil power supports, and helps to maintain. I know it; but I want you first to see what the relation of the world is to the Church, and then you will be able to judge, if what we see around us, under the guise of a "national Church" has its pattern in Scripture or not. There the world and the Church are at opposite poles. Turn to the Lord's prayer in John 17, for we must go to Scripture to get the truth on this point. There our blessed Lord and Master, the night before His death, is crying to His Father for His people. He says, in the course of that prayer, "I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world" (vs. 6); and then adds, "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine" (vs. 9). Had He no interest in the world? The deepest interest—He died for it; but He did not then want the world as a sphere for the display of His power and rule as Son of Man—which will come all in due time. It is the very reverse of a prayer He will yet pray in response to God's decree: "Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession" (Psa. 2:8). The Son of God is told there to ask, and God will give Him the heathen, the nations, for His inheritance. Has He prayed that prayer? No, because if He had He would have got them.

What then has He done? He has passed through the world, been rejected by it, died out of it, that He might glorify God about sin; He has annulled the power of death, broken up the grave, and brought to naught the power of Satan. He has ascended on high, sent down the Holy Spirit, the Church has been formed, and that Assembly is His witness during His absence. He says to His Father, I do not pray for the world yet—the day has not yet come when I want the world. In the meantime I pray for My people. He will get the world yet, and the kingdoms of the world, as we read in Revelation 11, where there is immense delight in heaven, when the last angel sounds: "And there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever" (vs. 15). The moment has then arrived for the rejected King to get His rights; then He will pray the prayer of Psalm 2, and it will be answered without delay.

But the prayer of the second Psalm has not yet been presented to God. For whom then does the Lord pray? His own who are in, but not of the world. "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine. And all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy name: those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:9-16). It is a wonderful place the Christian holds in this world—let us take it to heart—loved by Christ and hated by the world. A wonderful position of privilege and responsibility attaches to every child of God today to be here as the representative of God morally. In resurrection the Lord said to His own, "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (John 20:21), to manifest grace, love, holiness, and

what God is in active goodness—that is the mission of the saint of God, the Church of God, in this world. As holy priests we are to offer up “spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5), and as royal priests we are to “show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (vs. 9).

Could we then expect the world to support this blessed divine institution, which our Lord calls “My assembly,” purchased with His own blood, and which we have seen is the House of God and the Body of Christ? Should we expect any support, any countenance from the world for that? Clearly not. All the Church ever got by dabbling with, or truckling to the world was a lessening of its spiritual power and an increasing diminution of its light and real testimony for God. We see all round about us today what was prophetically delineated by the Spirit of God, who foresaw that the world would creep into the Church and be its downfall. We get a most distinct unfolding of this defection and the expressed mind of Christ in relation to it all in Revelation 2 and 3. The Lord there sends seven letters to the seven Assemblies in Asia, commencing with Ephesus, the most favored of all as to privilege, for its history began with Paul’s ministry, and it received his letter somewhat later. I have no doubt in these seven addresses we have a panoramic view of a prophetic nature, showing that which the Church of God—seen in responsibility down here as the vessel of testimony—would be, during the absence of the Lord. They were seven local assemblies, and were told that if they did not answer to the mind of the Lord they would be removed; and they have been—there is scarce a trace of real Christianity in any of those places today. The candlestick has been removed. But there is more than this, if we look at them, as we ought to, as prophetically unfolding the main features of the Church’s history, as seen in its responsibility, from its first defection of heart for Christ, to the final removal of the vessel of testimony by spueing out of His mouth.

In Ephesus it was the declining of first love—the Church could get on without Christ’s personal company, and though busy in His things they could do without Him; they had let other things come in. They got sleepy, dull, and occupied with the things of the world, and ceased to be according to the mind of Christ. This took place, historically, in the first and second centuries of the Christian era.

Then in Smyrna you have great persecution, and that epoch was seen in the second and third centuries, when the most fearful persecutions took place. The Lord said, “Ye shall have tribulation ten days” (Rev. 20), and it has been noticed that there were ten distinct times of persecution. But the devil found out that persecution was just the way to wake up God’s people. First of all Satan will try and seduce you; and if he cannot do that, he will seek to crush you—these were always his tactics. The flames of persecution, however, brought out more and more what was in the saints that had been wrought by God. They were all the brighter for it, so Satan altered his opposition again, with better success.

When we come to Pergamos, where do we find the Church of God has taken up her abode? The complaint of the Lord is, “I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s throne is” (Rev. 2:13). They had not given up the confession of His name nor denied His faith, even in those days—looking back to the times of persecution in Smyrna—when Anti-pas (meaning “against everybody”) was the characteristic attitude of faithfulness to Christ, involving martyrdom in many. I would like to be an Antipas, if everyone else is giving up the truth, as was then the case as regards keeping separate from the world. Get hold of the Lord, and if everybody is against you, put your back against the rock and stand. Someone once said to Luther, “All the world is against you.” His reply was, “God and I are a match for them.” Many an Antipas lost his life, but their names are enshrined in the Lord’s memorial of them—“My faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth” (vs. 13).

This epoch, which Pergamos describes, corresponds with the fourth century, when the Roman Empire became nominally Christian. The Emperor Constantine embraced Christianity outwardly, though we are told he deferred his baptism to his deathbed. Instead of trying to crush out Christianity, pagan Rome—now become Christian in profession—said, We will shield Christians, we will take care of them, we will take them under our wing; and that was the utter defeat of God’s professing Church. They were taken under the wing of the world, protected, and upheld by the world, and the profession of Christianity forced on heathen races at the point of the sword. This really was the Church going into captivity. Her being thus established among the nations led to what is now by men called the “Established Church.” I do not wonder at one of your greatest and most pious men in Scotland—when he saw the nominal Church of the land about to assemble, accompanied by martial bands and mounted soldiery—saying of it then, “There goes the Church in chains.” He saw that which was nominally the Church supported by all the world could furnish. God always tells us what is coming, so what Dr Chalmers saw, Scripture prepares us for.

In Thyatira things go from bad to worse. In Pergamos the Church courted the world. In Thyatira the Church ruled the world. It perfectly describes the dark ages, which ran fully a thousand years, when Rome as the ecclesiastical mistress of the nations of Europe, could excommunicate monarchs, and go the length of compelling a king to go and kiss the Pope’s toe. You say, That is ancient history. Yes, but here in Revelation 2 it is all depicted before it came to pass. And that is why the Lord said to Thyatira, “Notwithstanding I have this against thee, that thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess; and she teaches and seduces my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols” (Rev. 2:20). The Church began to teach in these days instead of being content to be taught. Consequently its edicts were promulgated and Scripture set aside—yea, soon forbidden to be read by the laity. We do not get in Scripture that the Church teaches. She is taught. She has to listen to God, and by His apostles and prophets of the New Testament His mind has been revealed. The Church has only to obey. God teaches by His Word, and only by His Word and His Spirit, so that any teaching not in keeping with Scripture is utterly valueless to an obedient child of God. The point is this—that which is the real teaching power in the Church of God today is the same as at the beginning, namely, the Holy Spirit acting in energy through the gifts that Christ, as Head of the Church, still furnishes to His Body.

Thyatira runs on to the Lord’s return, it must be noticed. “That which ye have already, hold fast till I come” (vs. 25), shows this; and the papacy will continue till then without doubt. That history has a strange way of repeating itself is only too true, and Jezebel is going ahead with leaps and bounds in this present day in the British Isles. This will continue till the rapture of the saints—the removal to heaven of God’s Assembly—and then “Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth” (see Rev. 17:4-5, et seq.)—the Apostate Church—will be destroyed by the ten horns and the beast, who will hate the whore and burn her with fire. What she taught was mingling with the world socially, and going on with the world religiously. Hence in Christendom everywhere you have Established Churches, with State patronage and pay, and the reigning monarch the head of the nation and of the Church at one moment, by reason of his exalted position nationally, irrespective of any question of his knowledge of Christ, of being born of the Spirit and sealed by the Spirit—which is the very essence of Christianity—and the whole idea of the Headship of Christ is lost. Of course this kind of an Established Church suits man in the

flesh, that is, the world generally. In fact it is what is called "the Christian world." What an idea! Does it not make you shudder? The world murdered Jesus; how can it be Christian, not knowing Christ? Let us open our eyes to Scripture, and what God's Word gives us.

I see the world to be a system where man wants to get on and be happy without God; and if you bring in the light and truth of God's Word to men of the world, they will soon let you know what they think of you. The world is the world—let us beware of it. Our Lord truly said: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also" (John 15:18-20). Bearing His words in mind, what shall we do? We cannot get out of the world, but we can walk through it as witnesses for Christ. We are interested in every man in it, and I should like to drag every man out of it and bring him to know Christ as his Savior, Lord and Head.

Now as to endowment. You will find there is such a thing as Christian endowment in the New Testament, and that the Church of God is splendidly endowed. You get the endowment in Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12; and Ephesians 4:7-13. It is all that the Holy Spirit can bring into the Church, nothing else. Any other endowment will eventually only do harm. In Romans 12 all flows from God; in Ephesians 4 Christ in glory is the source of the gifts; while in 1 Corinthians 12, for practical use and profit in the Assembly everything is by the Spirit. "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (vs. 7). Some think this means everybody, and that all men, Jew, Turk, infidel, or heathen—have the Spirit. The only man who, according to the teaching of Scripture, has the Spirit of God today, is the one who has been born of the Spirit, been led to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, been washed in the blood of Christ, and subsequently sealed by the Spirit. That is true of every believer today—he is sealed for security and enjoyment, and whatever gift God may in His grace give him is for the benefit of all the rest. "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit" (vs. 8). All the spiritual gifts taken together are the endowment—the divine endowment—of God's Assembly.

I used to have great difficulty about 1 Corinthians 13—as to why its portrayal of love came in there, between chapter 12, which describes the various gifts given to the Assembly, and chapter 14, which shows the sphere of their exercise, that is, the Assembly in function—like Parliament in session—where Paul makes it very plain that "profit" is to be the keynote of what takes place in God's Assembly. I could not understand why the apostle broke off his subject of gifts and began to speak of love in chapter 13. I think I see it now. The reason is this—in chapter 12 we have some of the variety of gifts with which the Holy Spirit endows the Assembly of God. In chapter 14 we see that Assembly in function, and the keynote of that chapter is, What will build up? What will profit? What profited was to obtain—what did not was allowed no place. No matter what gift you may have, it is of no possible value in the Assembly unless you have come right through the atmosphere of chapter 13. You have to be permeated—you and your gift—in love, or it is no good at all. Whatever you may have, if it be not exercised in love—the spirit of chapter 13—it is really valueless. Love thinks of everybody but itself, and seeks their profit. That is a fine chapter to spend your spare moments in; you will come out a very different kind of man after doing so, for you will be so like Christ.

There, then, is the endowment of the Assembly of God; and now let us go back to Acts 20, because the servant of the Lord who brought out the truth of Church Endowment illustrated it in his own history, and in so doing he brings out points of great importance. Paul had wrought at Ephesus for over two years (Acts 19:8-10), many had been blessed, and while there, in the exercise of apostolic authority, he had doubtless appointed elders over the newly formed Assembly. Sometime after this, being at Miletus, he sent for them to come to him. He gave them a lovely review of his ministry in Asia, and followed it by the solemn charge: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the assembly of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood [or, blood of His own]. 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 20:28-30).

Now we have often heard of apostolic succession, and men today might deceive you or me about it, so it is well to notice what Scripture says. Paul says, I shall have successors, but they will be "grievous wolves." The Lord speaks about them also: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matt. 7:15). We have to use our spiritual eyes, and see, and possibly we must ask, Is that man a man of God? or, Is he a wolf in sheep's clothing? The Lord speaks of false prophets, as those who come in and exercise their influence over men, and we are all apt to be influenced. The Lord tells us what they were, and Paul also indicates them. There were no apostolic successors—though there were those who falsely took that place. The Lord in writing to the Ephesians by the pen of John says, "Thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars" (Rev. 2:2). The apostles were the foundation of the Assembly (see Eph. 2:20). The foundation of a house once laid is not repeated. Hence we should not expect to find apostolic successors. To any man who takes up that ground I should say, Scripture does indicate you, but it is not by a name to be desired. The man that takes up that ground, and assumes to be an apostolic successor must of necessity find himself classed among "grievous wolves" and "liars." Those are epithets that no sober man would desire to be labeled with, yet, notwithstanding this, so-called "apostolic successors" are to be found in Christendom today. With this clear light of Scripture on the subject we may dismiss the figment of "apostolic succession." Deliverance from it will help many a child of God into the truth, however, for while Christ gave no more apostles nor any apostolic successors, in His tender love He has continued to give all the gifts needed for the upbuilding of His Church. He never hinted at—as is to be expected—and was careful not to introduce that which we have seen introduced by man, with very sad results, as witnessed in Rome and "her children" (see Rev. 2:23).

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers [or "bishops"—as it is everywhere else rendered], to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. 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 20:28-30) was good advice to those Ephesian elders, and to all who seek to minister in divine things. True ministry always detaches souls from the minister, and attaches them to Christ; and if ministry does not do that, then it is bad, pernicious. Holy Ghost ministry always leads the hearer to have to do with Christ personally, and to value the written Word of God. How fully did Paul feel this as he said, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (vs. 32). There again is the endowment in result—believers are built up, enriched, and brought into touch with all the saints, that is, those separated to God. Where must the saint of God find his resources and supplies in this or any day? In God, and His Word.

Hold on to that Word. Let no “higher critic” with his ax of infidel origin lop from your Bible the portion which his “scientific criticism”—outcome only of his own blindness to the necessity of its place in the arch of inspired revelation—would have you expunge. Mark the man that would rob you of a line of it. You may say, He is a clever, learned, up-to-date, good man. I care not; if he touch my Father’s Word he is a robber in disguise, a wolf in sheep’s clothing. I believe that book to be inspired from cover to cover, but I know that in the so-called Church today the men who are undermining faith in that book are the very men who should be its conservators. They pose as its expositors, and are paid to be its upholders, but too many, alas I are mere “Scripture-destroyers” so far as their teaching evinces. I would say lovingly to you—Beware of these robbers; heed them not. If we were to listen to the bold and bald infidelity of these latter-day critics of God’s holy Word, they would rob us of most of its books, leaving but few pages for faith to feed on. In fact, little but the covers would be left. I would exhort you to do what I purpose doing. What is that? I will make them a present of the covers, and keep the book intact.

The apostle next says: “I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me” (vss. 33-34). Why does that come in? The apostle knew what a part money was going to play in Christendom. And you know today how much people are thinking about Church-money, and what a commotion there is in this land over it. Do you find money much connected with God’s things in Scripture? I do not, at least in a commendatory way. It has a large place in Christendom. Very large. Did you ever face this question—What would be the result if money and music were taken clean out of Christendom? Take out money. Would not many pulpits be affected? Take out music, and many pews would be emptied. And that is the Church, is it? Little wonder that the Church is today the laughing-stock of the world, as they note the keen contest for goods and gear, money and manses.

But you say, The servants of the Lord must be supported. Certainly. Look at this dear man of God, and see how he was supported. To everyone who would have given to him, he could say, I do not want your support. To the Philippians he wrote when they had sent him help: “Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account” (Phil. 4:17). At that time he was a prisoner, but before then he supported himself by making tents, and I guarantee they were the best tents in the market (Acts 18:3). He would not give any man a chance of saying, Paul was paid for it; or, I have made Paul rich. He kept himself; and I think the man that earns his bread by some honest trade, and then gives himself to the work of the Lord, is the happiest and the freest man, because he is perfectly independent of any man but his Master. Paul would not take a penny from the Corinthians (see 1 Cor. 9:15,18; 2 Cor. 11:7-9), though he laid down the rule that the servant should be supported. He laid it down for others and flung it up for himself. He labored and supported himself, ministered the truth, but kept the things of God far apart from “filthy lucre” as he himself terms it (Titus 1:7).

Money is spoken of in Scripture, but rarely with commendation, for “the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Tim. 6:10). This statement is easily corrected if not true. Let us trace the history of money in connection with Christ and His things. It began with Judas, who grudged his Master the value of the box of ointment that Mary of Bethany broke over His blessed body. He could have made “three hundred pence” out of it, and kept for himself what would not have been missed from the bag he bare (John 12:5,6). Foiled then, he directly afterward sold his Master for “thirty pieces of silver” (Matt. 26:14-16). Next we hear of the “hush money” which the chief priests and elders of Israel paid the Roman soldiers to deceive the world and deny the Lord’s resurrection. “They gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, his disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor’s ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day” (Matt. 28:12-15).

The end of Acts 4 shows Barnabas doing well with his money as he lays it “at the apostles’ feet” (vss. 36-37). This act then led some others in the Assembly to desire to have a better character for devotedness than they deserved. Ananias and Sapphira sought to deceive the apostles about the price of their land. They were convicted of having “lied to the Holy Ghost,” and the hand of God fell upon them in judgment, and they died.

Then in Acts 6 “there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration” (vs. 1). In Acts 8 Simon the sorcerer offered money to the apostles to buy the Holy Spirit, which revealed his true state, for Peter says to him: “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God” (vss. 20-21).

The twice repeated allusion to Balaam should make every man chary of trafficking in divine things coupled with money, lest he in any degree might seem to be of those “which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Peter 2:15).

The Apostle Jude’s allusion to such is no less solemn, “Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core” (vs. 1). Three characters of evil which would be apparent in Christendom, becoming apostate, are thus portrayed.

“The way of Cain” is mere natural religion characterized by the opposition of the flesh to God’s testimony and God’s real people. “The error of Balaam” is an ecclesiastical evil, teaching error for reward. “The gainsaying of Core” is open opposition to God’s authority in his true King and Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ. From how many pulpits today is the very divinity of the blessed Lord denied, and the atonement He effected scouted, as being quite unnecessary, for man is not fallen and needing redemption, but ascending gradually.

In a day when the ministry has become, alas! a mere “bread trade” with many—I do not say all—who take it up, just as a man would enter the army, the navy, or one of the learned professions, to make a living thereby, and are prepared to fling Scripture and scriptural creeds to the winds, to keep in touch with the world’s advancing infidelity, Jude’s words are indeed weighty and pregnant with deepest warning to all who minister in God’s house.

The less money enters into the things of God the better. The endowment of the Assembly of God has no relation to money. Its endowment consists in the Scriptures of truth—God’s holy Word—and in the Holy Spirit. The latter dwells in every Christian, and likewise in the Assembly, and is competent to supply all that the Assembly needs in its earthly pathway down here.

If I have trenched in these remarks upon anything that you have held as true and sacred, believe me it is only because I desire that you and I should walk in the light of Scripture, and according to what God has given in His Word. God builds, God establishes, God furnishes, God endows; and His Spirit is as much here today to supply all the need of His Assembly as on the day of Pentecost. The Lord give us to heed His Word.

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