

# The Plumb Line

A Teaching Ministry of Fellowship Bible Church



## Pauline Studies Part III

### Life in the Church

A Survey of the Pauline Epistles

Summer/Fall 2022

Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

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**Lesson 1 – Hermeneutics of the Epistle**  
**Text: Ephesians 4:1 – 16**

*“Pooling of knowledge is edifying to the church;  
pooling of ignorance is destructive.”*  
(R. C. Sproul)

It is perhaps close to the essence of the Reformed tradition to emphasize doctrine as the bedrock of the Christian life and of the life of the Church. As true as this is, it can also be rendered dangerously false by a lack of balance. There should be no argument against the principle that *Truth* is the heart of the divine revelation in Scripture and, certainly, in Jesus Christ who is the *Way, the Truth, and the Life*. Yet one must meditate on the fact that this revelation of divine truth was not presented to mankind in the form of a Systematic or Dogmatic Theology, in the manner so prevalent among Reformed scholars for the past five centuries. There is no step-by-step syllogistic and logical progression of the doctrines of the existence and attributes of God, of Christology, of Soteriology, and so forth. Rather we find that the divine revelation of Truth is given to us as interwoven in a grand narrative complete with historical annals, poetry and allegory, and the strange genre of the apocalyptic. Before us in this study is the most common genre of presentation for the revelation that has formed the doctrinal framework and substance of the Christian faith: the epistles of Paul.

No one denies that the Apostle to the Gentiles is *par excellence* the theologian of Christianity. Yet Paul wrote no *Institutes of the Christian Religion*<sup>1</sup>, no *Elenctic Theology*<sup>2</sup>, no *Systematics* of any kind. He wrote *letters*. The epistles were usually written in response to a situation or question that had arisen in one of the churches of which Paul was the founding apostle, though the Epistle to the Romans is a most



Moisés Silva (b. 1945)

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<sup>1</sup> As did John Calvin, in three different and progressive editions.

<sup>2</sup> As did Francis Turretin in the century after Calvin. ‘Elenctic’ is a method of logic that refutes a position by showing the falsehood of its conclusion.

notable exception to this rule. “Biblical scholars often refer to these letters as *occasional* writings. This term does not at all suggest that they are trivial or carelessly written documents. What scholars are seeking to emphasize is that Paul, for example, wrote his letters to meet specific historical needs.”<sup>3</sup> This fact must be kept constantly in view if a proper interpretation of Paul is to be attained; the epistles cannot be viewed as dogmatics in *content* without the *form* of presentation being maintained at all times. Technically, the theology of Paul is given to us in *epistolary* form, which simply means in the form of letters. And thus they are to be read.

The hermeneutical challenge to the modern reader is the realization that the *occasion* of the original letter is no longer a historical reality; indeed, it is sometimes very difficult to discern just what the historical occasion was that called for the letter to be written in the first place. “In other words, the authors wrote the epistles for specific occasions to address individual audiences who were facing unique problems. Interpreters must reconstruct those original ‘occasions’ and purposes as precisely as possible in order to separate timeless principles from situation-specific applications.”<sup>4</sup> For instance, we know by inference that Paul received at least one letter from the Corinthian church and that he himself wrote at least one letter to the same church other than the two we have in our New Testament. In that case as in so many others, we infer the problem from the ‘answer’ that the apostle gives in dealing with questions from a letter no longer extant. But this method is, at best, indirect, and has given rise to many disagreements as to the ‘root cause’ or occasion for the letters.

This is especially true of the more polemical of the apostle’s letters – Galatians, first among them, but also Colossians. What was the controversy that Paul was addressing? Was it a nascent Gnosticism rising up in the mid first century? Judaizers certainly seem to be the bad actors in the Galatian region, but scholars are not so sure what the underlying controversies were in the Colossian church or, for that matter, in Ephe-

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<sup>3</sup> Kaiser, Walter C. and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House; 1994); 125.

<sup>4</sup> Klein, William W., Craig L. Blomberg & Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word Publishing; 1993); 352.

sus and Philippi. The ‘resurrection’ controversy seems to have been different in Corinth than in Thessalonica, with the former spiritualizing the resurrection and the latter thinking it had already occurred. But all of this is to be expected in light of the genre of epistle – letters written at a certain time in history to address a certain issue or issues germane at that time. Still, this fairly simple recognition of the literary style and the historical conditioning of the epistle does not answer the exegetical difficulties presented by this form of writing to the traditional, Reformed, ‘historical-grammatical’ hermeneutic. In simple terms, if we do not know what the problem was at the time, can we really apply the apostle’s solution to another time, namely, our own?

At the outset we need to be clear with regard to the term just used: ‘conditioning.’ There has been a great deal of ink spilled over the past two centuries – intensified over the past generation – regarding the *cultural* conditioning of Paul’s letters. It is maintained that Paul’s letters pertained to the culture of 1<sup>st</sup> Century Mediterranean world (as if that was, in itself, a homogenous, monolithic culture). Thus what Paul has to say about life as a believer, and life in the church, must be ‘reconditioned’ for the time in which we now live – the epistles need to be *acculturated* to our own situation. In response to this hermeneutic, we may *a priori* state that our culture is not Paul’s culture, while at the same time recognizing that Paul’s culture was not uniform throughout the region in which he lived and preached and planted churches. The idea of a monolithic culture is a social construct that does not exist anywhere at any time. Still, we cannot deny or ignore the fact that 21<sup>st</sup> Century Western culture is not the same, even in a broad average, as 1<sup>st</sup> Century Mediterranean culture.

This may sound a bit too liberal for some, but consider another ‘cultural’ phenomenon from the Gospels: *foot washing*. Even though Jesus Himself said to His disciples that they should ‘*do likewise*’ to one another, foot-washing is not generally practiced among Protestant churches, for the primary reason that the ‘cultural’ milieu no longer pertains to a culture of shoe-wearers and concrete sidewalks; it is the spirit of humble service that abides from the act, not the act itself. While most of us accept this interpretation, we must also accept that it is a form of acculturation – the interpretation of a bib-

lical passage (even a *dominical injunction*) influenced by the manifest difference between the original culture and the applied culture. In other words, even conservative, Reformed biblical scholars practice acculturation.

But does that give free reign to modern scholars to reinterpret Paul in light of modern norms and mores? For instance, can we simply ignore what Paul has to say with regard to the role and relationship of men and women in the church, because modern society has accorded a much more egalitarian role to the woman than that which prevailed in his day? Furthermore, are we justified in criticizing the apostle for his ‘unenlightened’ views, not only on women but also on slavery, now that we have benefited from the wisdom of William Wilberforce and Susan B. Anthony? Silva writes, “It is not unusual to hear comments about the *contextualized* character of these books – the implication being that they may have been relevant at one time in a particular historical context, but not now.”<sup>5</sup>

Such a hermeneutical approach strikes at the very heart of the church’s view on the inspiration of Scripture. It escapes the liberal theologian and the ‘evangelical feminist’ that limitless acculturation of the biblical text destroys any meaningful concept of biblical inerrancy or authority, and introduces fatal subjectivism to all exegesis. If there is nothing timeless in the text of the Bible, then its source cannot be eternal; it cannot be inspired in any sense of the word. Indeed, it becomes apparent that the exegete himself/herself is the only ‘inspired’ actor in the drama. But one wonders how to acculturate II Timothy 3:16. No, the modern believer as well as the ancient one is left with the inescapable challenge of discerning the timeless truths and timeless application of the Word of God through the historically-conditioned narratives, poetry & wisdom writings, and epistles through which God has revealed both Himself, His redemptive plan, and His purpose for His people. And because we live on this side of the Cross, the Resurrection, and Pentecost, this challenge is nowhere so daunting as with the Pauline epistles, the theological and practical substance of the Christian Church.

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<sup>5</sup> Kaiser & Silva; 137.

Perhaps the first step in the hermeneutical consideration of the ‘epistle’ is to realize, all complications aside, that these are letters. One of the oldest forms of communication, the letter is also one of the most intimate, the most personal. It is true that ancient writers like Cicero and Seneca used the form of the epistle to put in writing what were essentially carefully crafted speeches, but for the most part the literary form of ‘letter’ was primarily a means of communication between two people, or between a person and a group, which is the case with the Pauline epistles (with the possible exception of Philemon and the Pastorals). Thus most conservative scholars conclude with Moisés Silva that, “We have no good reason to think that Paul had any literary pretensions when he wrote the documents.”<sup>6</sup>

Yet it is also clear that the Pauline epistles were not merely personal letters without very important form and content for the church as a whole. These letters from the apostle’s pen were the earliest recognized ‘canon’ of the Christian community, which knew implicitly (and by the testimony of the Holy Spirit) that these were far more than just private, personal communication between Paul and the people in the churches he planted. Even those letters specifically addressed to individuals “go well beyond personal concerns.”<sup>7</sup> It seems clear to us, as it did to the early church, that these letters address more than the individuals and churches to which they were specifically sent: they address the Church as a whole as well as every representative congregation throughout the world and throughout the millennia since they were written. There is evidence even at the beginning that Paul himself was aware of the churchwide significance of what he was writing, in that he intended at least some of his letters to be circulated and read to other local bodies. At the end of his Epistle to the Colossians, Paul writes, “*Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.*”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, we conclude that with the

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<sup>6</sup> Kaiser & Silva; 122.

<sup>7</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>8</sup> Colossians 4:16. Some scholars believe the letter sent to the Laodiceans was, in fact, the Epistle to the Ephesians; most, however, believe it to be, like that to the Corinthians, another Pauline letter that was not included in the canon.

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Pauline Epistles we are confronted with timeless, inspired Truth in the form of personal, occasional letters.

If we wish to use them responsibly, however, we need to respect their character. As noted in a previous chapter, reading a historical account as though it were poetry (or vice versa) does injustice to the writing and leads to misunderstanding. Similarly, reading one of Paul's letters as though it were a technical book or reference or a seminary textbook of theology can take us down the wrong interpretive path.<sup>9</sup>

Still, beginning with the fact that these are *letters*, we may also start with the manner in which letters are normally read: *in their entirety in one reading*. When Paul instructs the believers at Colossae to read the letter he had written to the Laodicean church, no doubt he intended for them to read it all at one time, in one of their regular meetings. He may have had no inkling that his letters would one day be subjected to the dissection, analysis, and cross-referencing that we propose to do in this study. In defense of such atomistic analysis of the Pauline epistles we have the fact that homilies and sermons from parts of these letters were pervasive in the Church from the earliest records. It is not that studying Paul's letters verse-by-verse, and harmonizing letter to letter, is in itself a wrong exegetical approach. It is only that one must not lose sight of the fact that these are *letters* and should regularly be read by all believers *in their entirety*. Letters, and *occasional* letters especially, have a central theme and a guiding purpose. Silva writes, "Moreover, part of the meaning of the document is the total impact it makes on the reader, and that meaning is often more than the sum of its parts."<sup>10</sup>

By reading the epistles in their entirety we also increase the likelihood of discerning the *occasion* for which the letter was written (though that holy grail may remain elusive in some cases). Just as all biblical exegesis must remain oriented toward *context*, determining the occasion of the epistle provides the overarching context under which individual passages and sections must therefore be interpreted. We will see that this is particularly true for topics that show up in various epistles, but in different forms and

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<sup>9</sup> Kaiser & Silva; 122.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*; 123.



with different, and seemingly contradictory, statements. Case in point is Paul's treatment of the Law in his various letters – scholars have too often accused the apostle of inconsistency, if not downright confusion, because they themselves have lost sight of the overarching context of each epistle. Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians under far different circumstances (or occasion) and for far different reasons, than he wrote the Epistle to the Romans. The emphasis on overall context will be difficult to treat in a survey study such as this one, one that is focusing on Pauline *praxis* in the churches, but every attempt will be made to interpret individual passages from the epistles in a manner consistent with the overall thrust of that epistle.

Another important hermeneutical feature of *epistles* stems again from their personal address and style. Biblical scholars often wax eloquent, if we can call it that, on the fact that Paul does not use the same metaphors, the same terminology, even the same 'dogmatic' formulations every time he writes about the same topic in his different letters. Liberal scholars, of course, pass this off either to the apostle's logical inconsistency or to the 'fact' that the letter was not authored by Paul in the first place. Different metaphors are called for both by the different purposes of each letter and by the literary freedom any author has in composing his or her document, especially if that document is a letter. Indeed, the different epistolary themes, when they touch upon a common topic, provide a three-dimensional perspective of Paul's thought on that subject, a much fuller treatment than if he slavishly used the exact same words and figures of speech, as many scholars think he should. Even if the varied purposes of the epistles were not a historical reality, the breadth and depth of the topics that Paul deals with would more than justify the variety of metaphors and words used. There are such things as synonyms, and an author as capable as the Apostle Paul no doubt knew how to employ them.

What this leads us to, and to circle back on an earlier comment, is the fact that epistles are not systematic theologies. They are very personal, yet in the case of the Pauline corpus, they are general enough to apply to all churches both in the apostle's

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day and throughout time, as he writes regarding one important and controversial point (to be discussed later in this study) in the Corinthian church,

*But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.*

(I Corinthians 11:16)

Paul, at least, considered his approach to each church to be consistent with his approach to all the others. In view of the importance of the Pauline Epistles to the establishment of and life in the Church, it seems most reasonable to give the author the benefit of the doubt, if there is any, and to seek rather to understand the singular truth that is often displayed in multifaceted form. Therefore, in addition to reading the epistles *historically*, we are also justified in reading them *theologically*. The Pauline Epistles are not theological because they are in the Bible, they are in the Bible because they are theological. The apostle addresses each church and each specific occasion or problem from the bedrock position of his Christology – that God has in Christ Jesus completed the eschatological promises of the Old Covenant and has, through the Holy Spirit, inaugurated the New Creation. The message that has been entrusted to him to proclaim this truth – the gospel, or ‘my’ gospel – is the one non-negotiable element in all of Paul’s letters. He will “*become all things to all men*” in order bring as many to Christ as possible, while at the same time calling down anathemas on any man or angel who preaches a different gospel than the one he preached. Thus in the midst of the particular circumstances, the historical situations – some of which can no longer be discerned from the distance of twenty centuries – there is nonetheless a consistent theological message that unites the epistles with each other and with the rest of Scripture. Keeping this consistent theme firmly in site will help prevent misinterpretations of individual passages and statements.

One further hermeneutic point should be addressed here because it has sadly become conventional wisdom among Pauline scholars in the modern church. This is the contention made by many that there is evidence of *development* in the apostle’s theology through the progression of the various letters. This has become a popular way of deal-

ing with the variety of ways in which Paul addresses issues in different circumstances and churches. For instance, opposition is set up between the harsh manner in which Paul treats the Judaizers in the Epistle to the Galatians (*cp.* Gal. 2:11-21) and the more irenic view he espouses in I Corinthians 9:19-23, where he purposes to “*become all things to all men...*” But to say that Paul’s theology ‘developed’ between the two letters necessitates two (at least) conclusions: that we know the relative chronology of the two letters and that they were far enough apart in time to allow for what would be a very drastic ‘development,’ from anathema to acceptance (or perhaps the other way round?). Scholars assert with unjustified confidence the order and dating of the Pauline letters, none of which do we possess in original manuscript (and even if we did, the ancients did not write the date of the letter in the upper righthand corner of the first page).

Even more damaging is what this view of ‘development’ does to the authority of the Pauline corpus, for if Paul’s theology developed, it is reasonable to conclude that his



William W. Klein

later views supersede his earlier ones. This destroys any reasonable doctrine of biblical inerrancy and, once again, introduces terminal subjectivity into the interpretation of the Pauline letters. One’s view of the development of Pauline theology in the epistles is often determined by what it is one wants to hear Paul say (or, perhaps more often, what it is one *does not* want to hear Paul say). Klein, *et. al.* are correct to state that the possibility of development cannot be ruled

out *a priori* on the basis of a high view of Scripture, pointing to the fact that revelation itself is progressive.<sup>11</sup> But the concept of progressive revelation points to the unfolding of divine revelation over many centuries, not within the few years (or less) that might have elapsed between, for instance, Paul’s first and second letters to the church at Thessalonica. A high view of inspiration, as well as the underlying consistency in Paul’s writings, will motivate the exegete to avoid such facile and erroneous ‘solutions’ as that of ‘development of doctrine.’

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<sup>11</sup> Klein; 365.

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In reading the letters of Paul one must never forget that, while there were varying degrees of intimacy between the apostle and those to whom he wrote, at no time did he cease being God's called apostle. That was a hat he never took off. He might '*become all things to all men*' but he never stopped being an apostle. Therefore, even in letters written to his '*son in the faith*,' Timothy, or to an apparently close friend, Philemon, Paul remains '*a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.*'<sup>12</sup> His understanding of this mission, and his understanding of the work of God in Christ Jesus, forms the substratum of his advice, his answers, and his admonitions to the churches and to individuals within them. We find that when the apostle takes on issues that were controversial in his day – and some which remain controversial today – he does not do so from a social ethics perspective, nor from a progressive morality perspective, but only from a Gospel-of-God perspective. In some cases, consequently, he does not say what many wish he would have said: that slavery ought to be abolished in the churches, for instance, or that rebellion against the governing authorities is a matter of political conscience alone. The fact that the apostle refused to be drawn into situational conflicts – either in his day or ours – is what makes his letters so powerful, so timeless, and so controversial.

### Life in the Church

The emphasis in this study will be the construction of 'church life' according to the Pauline Epistles. This is not to be confused with the modern phrase, 'doing church,' as that has little to do with the apostle's conception of the Church as the New Creation community of the Holy Spirit. 'Doing church' in the modern context is pragmatically oriented and socially focused. One blogger sums it up rather succinctly: "But if the way you're doing church honors God and works for you, the people you're serving and the community you're reaching, keep doing it."<sup>13</sup> Honors God, *and works for you* – that is the mantra of the modern church. It escapes their awareness that that which 'works for

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<sup>12</sup> Romans 1:1

<sup>13</sup> [The Right Way to Do Church? | Pivot | A Blog by Karl Vaters \(christianitytoday.com\)](#). Accessed 16July2022.

you' often does not honor God. Sadly, though, it is the 'works for you' that is usually determinative.

Life in the church, however, means learning from Scripture – and particularly from the letters of Paul – what the divine plan and purpose is for the Church and for churches. It means coming to a more biblical understanding and application of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit, who animates and guides the Body of Christ, the Church. It means, perhaps more than anything in the modern context, shifting the emphasis away from *individualism* and rediscovering the centrality of the corporate body both in God's plan and in Paul's teaching. Yet it does not mean the resurrection of the concept of Christendom, or an attempt to apply Paul's ecclesiology to the 'universal' Church. Perhaps the most significant feature of the genre of epistle is the fact that each letter is written to a *local congregation* of believers. The principles, to be sure, are universal, but their application is always local. Paul can speak of '*all the churches*' because of the first point, but he speaks to the church at Corinth or the church at Ephesus because of the second point.

Unity never meant uniformity to Paul, though the two terms have often been confused in the Church over the past two millennia. Indeed, every movement *away* from the local congregation has historically been accompanied by a movement *toward* uniformity, and that often enforced either by the Church or by the State. In Paul's view, however, the church at Corinth was not the church at Rome, though both were themselves the body of Christ in those locations. Thus every ecclesiastical, Christological, Pneumatological, etc. principle applied equally to each congregation, though the manner in which these principles were manifested differed from congregation to congregation. This will be an important hermeneutical point to keep in mind as we investigate Paul's different responses to similar issues in different churches. There was a level of flexibility and grace in the way that Paul dealt with the churches that has often been missing in the institutional church over the past two thousand years. Paul was not wishy-washy; he did, however, leave room for the guiding of the Holy Spirit to perfect what God had begun in believers and in the church.

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*Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.*

(Philippians 3:15-16)

“*Be of the same mind*” is a constant refrain in Paul’s letters, though it is equally evident that this does not mean ‘think the same things.’ Perhaps the key passage concerning this unity of mind is found earlier in Philippians,

*Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*

(Philippians 2:1-4)

Within the same context we find what is perhaps the essence of Paul’s desire for each and every local congregation to which he wrote, and by extension, to each and every congregation throughout history.

*Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.*

(Philippians 1:27)

The oneness of mind that Paul admonished in every church was in relation to the gospel of Jesus Christ. ‘Mind’ here means ‘purpose,’ not ‘thinking.’ A common liturgy was not in Paul’s design any more than a common attire. A common goal, however, was: the faithful preaching of the gospel, the “*truth as it is in Christ Jesus.*” Thus the life of the church was to be such as complemented, even adorned, the gospel message with which the church is charged in every location and every generation. The church is the setting in which the gospel is the central jewel. But this does not mean, as many modern fundamentalists believe, that *evangelism* is the sole purpose of the church, for the gospel is much, much more than just a message of salvation for the lost. Paul admonished the Philippian believers to *strive together for the faith of the gospel*, which is the gos-

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pel in its entirety – both evangelistic and ecclesiological, both as the “*power of God unto salvation*” for the lost and the constant nourishment of believers.

Much of the admonition we find in the Pauline Epistles is toward *unity* and *peace*, that ‘*oneness of mind*’ of which the apostle speaks in Philippians. And it seems that the burden is entirely upon believers to maintain this unity and peace, something that every congregation in every age has struggled to do. Yet as with Paul’s doctrine of salvation, the emphasis on human effort is, though not illusory, insufficient to accomplish the goal. Believers are not more able to ‘work out’ the unity and peace of the church than they are of their own salvation. The unity of the body is achieved in the same manner as the salvation of the soul, through the power of God working within, as Paul himself teaches us in Philippians 2,

*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.* (Philippians 2:12-13)

This passage, usually interpreted individualistically, actually connects back to the corporate admonition quoted above. The ‘working out’ of salvation is, for Paul, a corporate endeavor at least as much, if not more, than it is a personal effort. But in both aspects the motive force is *God at work in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure*. The heart of Paul’s understanding of the unity and peace of the church is his understanding of the Holy Spirit as the life force, the living divine presence, of the church as the Body of Christ. The church is, in Paul’s estimation, a *pneumatic community* – a community of the Spirit. More than just the regenerative force and indwelling presence of God in each believer, the Holy Spirit is the adhesive that binds the church together as well as the energy that makes it live and grow strong. This emphasis is often overlooked in Paul, but from his use of the Temple imagery to his discourse on the ‘*charismata*’ – the ‘spiritual gifts’ – his recognition of the centrality of the Holy Spirit to the life and health of the Church, and each individual church, permeates all of his letters.

As we have seen in an earlier Pauline study, the gift of the Holy Spirit was perhaps the evidence *par excellence* of the messianic age, the fulfillment of Israel's eschatological hope. It becomes apparent in Paul's letters that the apostle not only views the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to be the inauguration of the New Age, the New Creation, but that he considers the Church to be the community of that New Creation in the midst of the age that is passing away. This presence of the Holy Spirit was both the fulfillment of all that Israel hoped for, and the attribute of the new community that most powerfully distinguished it from unbelieving Israel. James Dunn writes, "the sect of Nazarenes was evidently marked out within first-century Judaism by its claim to have been given the Spirit of God in a new and exceptional way."<sup>14</sup>



James D. G. Dunn (1939-2020)

This aspect of Pauline theology, and ecclesiology, is often overlooked or downplayed within Reformed theology – the centrality of the Holy Spirit in Pauline thought. But this neglect has led invariably to an institutionalizing of the church, with rigid delineation of roles and offices rather than the *distribution of the charismata severally as the Spirit wills*.<sup>15</sup> Much of this tendency comes from fear among church leadership regarding the unpredictable nature of that will, coupled with an inordinate (and unbiblical) desire to control the 'event' of Christian worship. But this is to usurp the supreme authority of God over His Church in the Person of the Holy Spirit. Thus Gordon Fee gives us, as it were, a guiding principle for the study of 'life in the church' when he writes, "The church, corporately and individually, is the place of God's own personal presence by the Spirit...The Spirit is the fulfillment of God's promise to dwell in and among his people; the Spirit is God *present* among us."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Dunn, James D. G. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1998); 417.

<sup>15</sup> I Corinthians 12:11

<sup>16</sup> Fee, Gordon D. *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Hendrickson Publishers; 1994); 8.



**Lesson 2 – Pneumatic Community**  
**Text: I Corinthians 3:1 - 17**

*“Long before the Spirit was a theme of doctrine,  
He was a fact in the experience of the community.”*  
(Eduard Schweizer)

Within the Reformed tradition the definition of a ‘true’ church is consistently set forth in a threefold designation: the preaching of the Word of God, the proper exercise of the sacraments, and the proper administration of church discipline. The Belgic Confession is representative of the view held by Reformed churches for five hundred years,

The true church can be recognized if it has the following marks:  
The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel;  
It makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them;  
It practices church discipline for correcting faults.<sup>17</sup>

Again, this is standard Reformed fare with regard to a ‘definition’ of the church. While these elements are important and should not be missing in any church, do they constitute ‘marks’ of a true church? The absence of any one of them would certainly be cause for concern, but is the presence of all three constitutive of a ‘true church.’ As with most confessions, the Belgic was written at a time of religious and political controversy and turmoil. In the mid-16<sup>th</sup> Century, political lines were hardening between Protestant and Roman Catholic dominions, a situation that would eventually descend into the abyss of the Thirty Years War beginning in 1618. The climate in which the Protestant confessions developed was powerfully ‘us-versus-them,’ as the Protestant communities in the Holy Roman Empire and in France struggled to withstand the onslaught of Roman Catholic forces – political, religious, and military. The St. Barholomew’s Day Massacre occurred in 1572, only thirteen years after the Belgic Confession was written. So we find the context of the Protestant confessions was not that of calm, meditative, theological study. Rather it was a cauldron of shifting alliances, political intrigue and wars,

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<sup>17</sup> Belgic Confession, Article 29. [The Belgic Confession | Reformed Church in America \(rca.org\)](https://www.rca.org) Accessed 19July2022.

and religious persecution. It should not surprise us, then, that confessions like the Belgic set the 'definition' of the church more in opposition to the Romish Church than as a full analysis of, for instance, the Pauline Epistles. There can be no doubt that the writers of the Belgic had Rome in mind in the same Article 29 quoted above:

As for the false Church, she ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does she administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in his Word, but adds to and takes from them, as she thinks proper; she relieth more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those, who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry.<sup>18</sup>

While understandable from the perspective of the times, it is significant to note that Article 29 of the Belgic Confession only mentions the Spirit once, and that not in relation to the 'true church,' but in regard to the believer's personal struggle against remaining sin.

With respect to those, who are members of the Church, they may be known by the marks of Christians: namely, by faith; and when they have received Jesus Christ the only Savior, they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof. But this is not to be understood, as if there did not remain in them great infirmities; but they fight against them **through the Spirit**, all the days of their life, continually taking their refuge in the blood, death, passion and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ, "in whom they have remission of sins, through faith in him."<sup>19</sup>

Sadly, Reformed theologians have not improved much on the confessions of the Reformation Era; indeed, many Reformed denominations seem to have become quick-frozen in the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> Century in terms of their Pneumatology - their doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This is especially true as Pneumatology meets Ecclesiology: where the Spirit and the Church intersect in Reformed thought. It is the general condition of Reformed writers with regard to the Church, and to the congregation, that these two branches of theological study do not meet, or do so only in passing. The Spirit in modern Reformed

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<sup>18</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>19</sup> *Idem.*

thinking is no less the agent of personal sanctification than it was to the authors of the Belgic Confession. One case in point is the classic Ecclesiology text by D. Douglas Banner-  
 man from 1887, titled *The Scripture Doctrine of the Church*. In the standard covenantal  
 manner, Bannerman traced the ‘church’ from Abraham  
 through to the book of Acts, from which history he then  
 concludes with a thorough discussion of the confession-  
 al ‘marks’ of the church as noted above from the Belgic.  
 But when one peruses the index for mention of the Holy  
 Spirit, nothing is found. Fast-forwarding to the present  
 day, we find the popular *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*



Mark Dever (b. 1960)

by Reformed Baptist pastor Mark Dever somewhat less deficient than Bannerman, but  
 still maintain the old Reformation line. Dever has expanded the marks from three to  
 nine, but none of them deals specifically with the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, Dever  
 omits the proper administration of the sacraments from his ‘marks,’ choosing to discuss  
 Baptism and the Lord’s Supper within the context of his other marks.

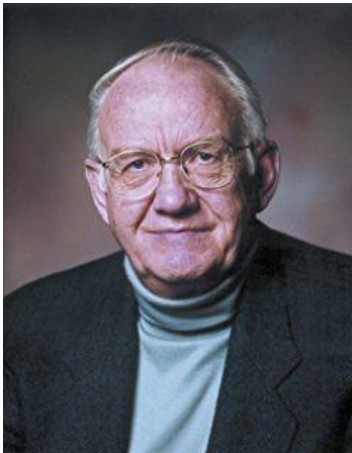
<b>Mark 1</b>	Expositional Preaching	<b>Mark 6</b>	A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership
<b>Mark 2</b>	Biblical Theology	<b>Mark 7</b>	Biblical Church Discipline
<b>Mark 3</b>	The Gospel	<b>Mark 8</b>	A Concern for Discipleship and Growth
<b>Mark 4</b>	A Biblical Understanding of Conversion	<b>Mark 9</b>	Biblical Church Leadership
<b>Mark 5</b>	A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism		

At least it can be said of Dever’s book that one can find references to the Holy  
 Spirit in the index. Yet even these references are slight and passing, and constitute ei-  
 ther orthodox, trinitarian doctrinal statements or benedictions, a mention of the ‘spir-  
 itual gifts,’ or the ‘need’ for the Holy Spirit to sanctify individuals and, thus, the church.  
 There is no *ecclesiology* of the Holy Spirit to be found, frankly, in most Reformed treatis-  
 es on the Church, simply because one does not seem to exist. It is as if the Reformed

## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

tradition has yielded all meaningful (and much meaningless) discussion with regard to the Holy Spirit to the Pentecostals and Charismatics, focusing instead on Christology and Soteriology. The Apostle Paul made no such distinctions, and the absence of teaching on the Person and work of the Holy Spirit as both *constitutive* and *essential* to the Church is a departure from Pauline ecclesiology.

In our earlier sessions of the Pauline Studies we noted that, to Saul of Tarsus, the evidence of the eschatological hope of Israel being fulfilled in Jesus Christ consisted primarily of two events: the *Resurrection* and the *Outpouring of the Holy Spirit*. The constituted the formation of a new community, or a revivification of the one community of God's people, Israel. We must extrapolate the eschatological expectations of the faithful



Gordon Fee (b. 1934)

Jewish community into the New Covenant fulfillment of these hopes, if we are to properly understand Paul's perspective concerning the Church, and concerning churches. Life in the church has no meaning apart from this eschatological orientation, not looking forward to the consummation of the age, but rather looking backward to the prophetic hope now fulfilled in Christ's Body, the Church. Gordon Fee writes, "I believe the Spirit to lie near the center of things for Paul, as part of the fundamental core of his understanding of the gospel. The reason for that in part stems from the eschatological framework of his Jewish roots, with its eager awaiting of the Spirit as part of the realization of the messianic age."<sup>20</sup> When one peruses this Old Testament expectation from the writings of the prophets, it becomes apparent that the gift of the Holy Spirit was rarely, if ever, spoken of as an *individual* thing; in all instances this gift, while given to individuals, was *corporate* and *communal* in its purpose. It was the gift of the Holy Spirit that would constitute Israel as truly God's people, able through the Holy Spirit to love and obey God as they must in order to live. Perhaps the most powerful prophetic vi-

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<sup>20</sup> Fee; 5.

sion in this regard is the ‘Valley of the Dry Bones’ in Ezekiel 37. The scene is set in the opening verses, with the crucial question posed to the prophet,

*The hand of the LORD came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry. And He said to me, “Son of man, **can these bones live?**”* (Ezekiel 37:1-3)

The vision continues with the bones coming together and being knitted with muscle and sinew, with flesh appearing on the bones; yet “*there was no breath in them.*”<sup>21</sup> It was not until the ‘breath’ came from the four points of the compass that the lifeless bones were vivified. In the Hebrew the word for ‘breath’ and ‘wind’ are the same as for ‘spirit’ – *ruach*, and it is this play on words that provides the inspired interpretation of the vision.

*Then He said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, ‘Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!’ Therefore prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it,” says the LORD.* (Ezekiel 37:11-14)

The prophecy was, of course, the resurrection of individuals – individual bodies coming together, their bones knitted together and flesh appearing on them: a *whole host* of individuals. But the focus is not on the individual; it is on *the whole house of Israel*. As a nation they were in exile, as the people of God they were separated from His presence and their Temple lay in ruin. They were *dead*, but God would make them live. And the agent of that revivification was none other than the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of YHWH. This passage follows on the ‘gospel’ in Ezekiel, also frequently interpreted in an individualistic manner to the neglect of the corporate impact on the people of God. The context of Ezekiel 36 is established not on the basis of individual salvation but on the

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<sup>21</sup> Ezekiel 37:8

basis of the nation of Israel as chosen by God, and has having utterly failing in that calling.

*Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying: "Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own ways and deeds; to Me their way was like the uncleanness of a woman in her customary impurity. Therefore I poured out My fury on them for the blood they had shed on the land, and for their idols with which they had defiled it. So I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed throughout the countries; I judged them according to their ways and their deeds. When they came to the nations, wherever they went, they profaned My holy name—when they said of them, 'These are the people of the LORD, and yet they have gone out of His land.' But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations wherever they went.*

(Ezekiel 36:16-21)

This is the passage from which Paul quotes in Romans 2, indicting his own people for their failure to keep the Law and the impact that failure has had upon Israel's testimony to the world, "*the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.*"<sup>22</sup> And it is within this corporate context that God promises the gift of the Holy Spirit.

*For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations. Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations. Not for your sake do I do this," says the Lord GOD, "let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel!"*

(Ezekiel 36:24-32)

While Ezekiel is the prophet of the gift of the Spirit, the promise itself was by no means absent from other prophetic writings. Centuries before Ezekiel, Isaiah had the same hope for Israel as God's people. He speaks of great distress upon Israel until the

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<sup>22</sup> Romans 2:24; *cp.* Ezekiel 36:23

time of refreshing, the time of the gift of the Spirit. This will inaugurate a time of prosperity and blessing.

*On the land of my people will come up thorns and briers,  
Yes, on all the happy homes in the joyous city;  
Because the palaces will be forsaken, the bustling city will be deserted.  
The forts and towers will become lairs forever, a joy of wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks –  
**Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high,**  
And the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is counted as a forest.  
Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field.  
The work of righteousness will be peace,  
And the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.  
My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.*  
(Isaiah 32:13-18)

And there is, of course, the famous ‘Pentecostal’ prophecy from Joel, a prophecy of tremendous importance to the life of the Church (and *in* the church) by virtue of the expansiveness of the promised gift of the Holy Spirit.

*And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;  
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.  
And also on My menservants and on My maidservants  
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.*  
(Joel 2:28-29)

The Apostle Peter, of course, knew this prophecy to be fulfilled on that first Pentecost of the Church; Paul was convinced of the same. At issue here for the apostles as for the prophets, was the dwelling of God with His people, a dwelling that was typified under the Old Covenant by the tabernacle in the wilderness and by Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem. It is this dwelling, this presence of God with His people, that constitutes the Church, the Body of Christ. We had had occasion to mention the *Shekinah* in past lessons, but it has its most important application with reference to the Church. Three times we read of the ‘coming’ of God to His dwelling place: twice historical, once prophetic. The two historical events were the *Shekinah*, or ‘Glory,’ of YHWH descending on

the tabernacle in the wilderness and on Solomon's Temple.<sup>23</sup> It is the third, prophetic mention of the descending of the *Shekinah* that interests us here, for it is that prophecy that has so often been misunderstood by the church. This prophecy is in the midst of the 'New Temple' vision given to Ezekiel and recorded in Chapters 40-48 of that book. Dispensational teaching has all but convinced modern, American evangelicals that this prophecy is yet to be fulfilled, that it must be fulfilled in a literal, 'brick & mortar' temple rebuilt in Jerusalem. This is not the interpretation of Jesus, nor of Peter, nor of Paul.

*Afterward he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory. It was like the appearance of the vision which I saw – like the vision which I saw when I came to destroy the city. The visions were like the vision which I saw by the River Chebar; and I fell on my face. And the glory of the LORD came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, **the glory of the LORD filled the temple.*** (Ezekiel 43:1-5)

The error of the Dispensationalist stems from his incorrect and unbiblical hermeneutic, whereby Israel is separated from the Church with respect to God's redemptive plan. To the Dispensationalist, 'Israel' must always mean physical Israel, and 'the Church' can never mean that. This hermeneutic is solidly refuted by Paul's letters, especially the Epistle to the Romans. Thus the sense of finality in the prophecy in Ezekiel must pertain to God's finished work of redemption for all time and for all peoples, not to some future reconstitution of the nation of Israel, the gathering of the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

*And He said to me, "Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever. No more shall the house of Israel defile My holy name, they nor their kings, by their harlotry or with the carcasses of their kings on their high places. When they set their threshold by My threshold, and their doorpost by My doorpost, with a wall between them and Me, they defiled My holy name by the abominations which they committed; therefore I have consumed them in My anger. Now let them put their harlotry and the carcasses of their kings far away from Me, and I will dwell in their midst forever.* (Ezekiel 43:7-9)

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<sup>23</sup> Cp. Exodus 40:34-45; I Kings 8:10-11



## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

It is significant to note, as we will through this study, how often the New Testament writers employ the temple imagery with reference to the Church. And the usage is not in similes but in statements of indicative fact.

*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.* (I Corinthians 3:16-17)

*Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* (I Peter 2:4-5)

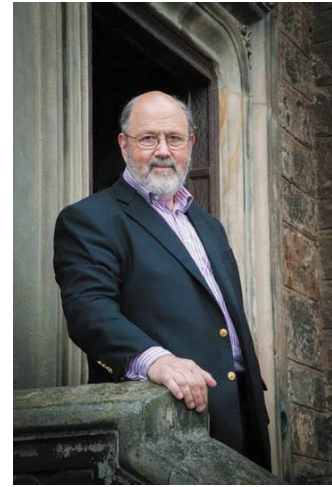
When we tie together the prophetic word regarding the gift of the Holy Spirit and the reconstitution of the Temple as the place of God's dwelling in the midst of His people, the fulfillment of the entire work of God is not yet in the future; it is in the past and present: the Temple of the Body of Jesus Christ, the Church. And the divine power that constitutes this Temple, and *is* the very presence of YHWH among His people, is the Holy Spirit who inhabits and enervates the Church and every local congregation. "The church, corporately and individually, is the place of God's own personal presence, by the Spirit...The Spirit is the fulfillment of God's promise to dwell in and among his people; the Spirit is God *present* among us."<sup>24</sup>

What is significant in these comments to our current study, is the fact that God *continues* to work in and through *a people*, and not primarily through individuals. There has come upon the modern, evangelical church - especially in the West - a view that has God slowly adding up the 'fulness of the Gentiles,' one by one through Christian evangelism. The 'Church' in this perspective is somewhat of a holding pen, a place of 'fellowship' for these believers, but something distinctly other than Israel, the people of God. Again, this viewpoint is a product of Dispensational teaching which has permeat-

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<sup>24</sup> Fee; 8.

ed evangelical thought in the United States for the past century, even among Reformed congregations.<sup>25</sup> The notion that ‘Israel is Israel and the Church is the Church’ has done great damage to the interpretation of Paul’s letters, to the Church’s understanding of herself, and consequently to ‘life in the church.’ It is the undeniable perspective of the Apostle that the Church – and each local representation of it – is *the Temple of God through the Holy Spirit*, the place of God’s dwelling in the midst of His people. N. T. Wright adds, “As far as Paul was concerned, the spirit, just like Jesus, was doing what YHWH himself had said he would do. The spirit was the further, and ongoing, manifestation of the personal presence of the one God.”<sup>26</sup> The church is a *Pneumatic Community* at her very core. To borrow and paraphrase Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, “This fact must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful will come from the letters Paul has written.”



N. T. Wright (b. 1948)

This, then, is the point of departure for our study of ‘life in the church,’ that “The church, as it stands, is thus already the new Temple, and the spirit that dwells within is the new Shekinah.”<sup>27</sup> The goal of this study is to ‘flesh out’ (no pun intended) what this means to believers and in the church, for there is no conception in Paul or in the New Testament of believers outside the church. Being the dwelling place of God through the Spirit now means that God has fulfilled the eschatological hope of Israel; there is no further expectation of a temple in Jerusalem or of any additional redemptive work by God. ‘*It is finished*’ pertains to the whole of the divine purpose to redeem a people for God’s Name. It also means, as we learn primarily from Paul, the *something new has begun*. The New Temple is also the New Creation, both of which in the Old Testament were areas of operation of God’s Spirit. We cannot, therefore, divide the church of Jesus Christ between ‘doctrinal’ and ‘charismatic’ congregations or denominations. If an assembly is

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<sup>25</sup> One should not be surprised to find the *Left Behind* series on the bookshelf of a Presbyterian brother or sister. The popular pastor & preacher John MacArthur somewhat epitomizes the influence of Dispensationalism even among Reformed congregations, as he purports to be a Reformed Dispensationalist.

<sup>26</sup> Wright, N. T. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 2013); 711.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*; 712.

not ‘charismatic’ – does not have the Spirit working in and through the members of the body, then it is not a church at all. And if a congregation holds weak or false doctrine, no matter how many of the ‘charismata’ it may claim among its members, it is at best a very sick church, and at worse a false and heretical one. For, as Jesus promised, the Spirit was to come “to guide you into all truth.”<sup>28</sup>

From the standpoint of the New Testament writings, the epitome of a ‘spiritual’ church is, of course, Corinth. Sadly, what Paul wrote to the Corinthian church has been mishandled and twisted into a positive statement on the issues of church life in Corinth, when in fact the letter is basically a polemic against the way the ‘charismata’ were being used there. Paul’s explicit “in this I do not praise you” lies implicitly behind most of what he writes in I Corinthians.<sup>29</sup> Little that they did was praiseworthy, and their understanding and employment of the ‘spiritual gifts’ was foremost among their deficiencies. However, because of the multitudinous errors of the church at Corinth, Paul’s epistles to the Corinthians form an excellent place to start on our journey to understand what a true *pneumatic community* really is. For in spite of the polemical character necessitated by their excesses at Corinth, we do not find Paul minimizing the centrality of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church, not in the least. The Spirit is in Corinth as in Ephesus or Rome, the divine life force that both creates and sustains, nurtures and grows the body of Christ.

### God’s Garden, God’s Building...God’s Temple

The Holy Spirit, and ‘spiritual’ believers, is a major theme in Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, but not at all in the way the Corinthian believers anticipated. In the opening greeting, the apostle gives thanks to God for the level of spirituality to which the Corinthian church had attained, though that thanksgiving quickly gives way to rebuke. This is because the Corinthian church lacked that which Paul considered the *sine qua non* of true spirituality: **unity**. There were divisions within the church at Corinth

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<sup>28</sup> John 16:13

<sup>29</sup> I Corinthians 11:22

and this fact belied their claim of spirituality. They were ‘enriched,’ yet they had brought themselves to a place of spiritual poverty.

*I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.* (I Corinthians 1:4-8)

It is interesting and significant that Paul then delays his explanation of their problem – announcing it in the very next breath from this word of thanksgiving – until he provides a thorough description of what really matters in the church – the *gospel of Jesus Christ mediated through the Holy Spirit*. This explanatory section is summed up in the closing verses of Chapter 2, where Paul defines, as it were, the truly ‘spiritual’ believer.

*But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For “who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ.* (I Corinthians 2:10-16)

Paul here contrasts two types of men, not two types of Christians. The first is the ‘natural’ man – *psychikos* – or ‘soulish’ man. This man has no discernment of the Spirit whatsoever for the simple reason that he is not in Christ at all. He is not a weaker or less spiritual Christian; he is not a Christian at all. He is a man according to the fallen nature; an unregenerate man who has no claim on the Spirit. It is the second type of man, the ‘spiritual’ – *pneumatikos* – man, who ‘discerns all things’ and ‘has the mind of Christ.’ Paul is subtly referring to himself, as throughout the letter we find that he must

‘defend’ his apostleship against the so-called ‘spirituals’ of the Corinthian church. But this defense comes in a general statement that is true of all who are genuinely regenerate. But, in fulfillment of Peter’s words concerning Paul’s teaching, this passage has sadly been used throughout Church history to set forth a hierarchy of spirituality within the church. Gordon Fee, himself a Pentecostal (Assemblies of God) minister and professor, leads the charge against this gross misuse of the passage.

This paragraph has endured a most unfortunate history of application in the church. Paul’s own point has been almost totally lost in favor of an interpretation nearly 180 degrees the opposite of his intent. Almost every form of spiritual elitism, ‘deeper life’ movement, and ‘second blessing’ doctrine has appealed to this text. To receive the Spirit according to their special expression paves the way for people to know ‘deeper truths’ about God. One special brand of this elitism surfaces among some who have pushed the possibilities of ‘faith’ to the extreme, and regularly make a ‘special revelation’ from the Spirit their final court of appeal. Other ‘lesser’ brothers and sisters are simply living below their full privileges in Christ. Indeed, some advocates of this form of spirituality bid fair to repeat the Corinthian error in its totality.<sup>30</sup>

Fee’s comment is a timeless reminder that the apostle was not praising the Corinthian church for their behavior. He was, in fact, chastising them for the manner in which they were abusing ‘spirituals’ by establishing what amounted to a pecking order within the congregation. The only reason that modern Pentecostal and charismatic churches have fallen into the same errors as Paul attempts to correct in this letter, is because they are guided by the spirit of the Corinthians, and not the Spirit of God. And from his ‘definition’ of the spiritual believer, the apostle moves now immediately into the rebuke. “Picking up the theme of being ‘spiritual’ from what has just preceded, Paul makes a frontal attack and pronounce the Corinthians as not spiritual at all. Indeed, they are just the opposite; they are ‘fleshly’ – still thinking like mere human beings, those who do not have the Spirit.”<sup>31</sup> In this ‘frontal attack’ the apostle also manifests the fundamental characteristic of a ‘spiritual’ church: unity.

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<sup>30</sup> Fee, Gordon *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1987); 120.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*; 122.

## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal? (I Corinthians 3:1-4)*

This passage is not actually at the heart of our discussion, though it is no less important. It presents another misinterpretation problem that became popular (again) in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century – the notion of the ‘carnal Christian.’ As with the hierarchy of spirituality discussed in regard to the closing verses of Chapter 2, such an interpretation of these opening verses of Chapter 3 completely miss Paul’s point. To conclude that Paul is establishing – even *sanctioning* – ‘levels’ or divisions of believers within the church is the epitome of out-of-context exegesis. To say that some of the Corinthian believers were ‘spiritual’ and others were ‘carnal,’ and to accept this as a normal situation, is entirely counter to the fundamental argument that Paul is making in this epistle. In fact, it was just such an elitist distinction that was already being made in Corinth, and that Paul condemns. This is the situational problem that proved to the apostle that the ones who considered themselves so ‘spiritual’ were, in fact, behaving in a very ‘fleshly’ manner. “The Corinthians are involved in a lot of unchristian behavior; in that sense they are ‘unspiritual,’ not because they lack the Spirit but because they are thinking and living just like those who do.”<sup>32</sup>

The proper understanding of the church, and the Holy Spirit in the church, follows this chastisement and is the reason we beginning this study in I Corinthians. Paul’s description of the church in I Corinthians 3 is perhaps his clearest and most concise depiction, intended to correct the faulty understanding prevailing among the Corinthian believers. And as he speaks of the ‘foundation’ of the church, it stands to reason that we should build our understanding of life in the church on this passage, foundational as it is.

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<sup>32</sup> Fee; 123.

*For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.* (I Corinthians 3:9-17)

In order to counter the divisive, schismatic spirit in Corinth, Paul emphasizes the oneness of God, whose church Corinth is. The church is God's field, God's building and, ultimately, God's Temple. As if to put 'spiritual gifts' into proper perspective, Paul takes the highest one – *apostleship* – and 'elevates' it to its proper place: *servant*. For some reason Paul leaves out Cephas/Peter in this passage, though he mentioned him in the first chapter as having a distinct following among the Corinthians believers along with Apollos and himself. The reason for this may be that Peter had never actually ministered at Corinth – there is no record of him having traveled there. If that is the case, then the 'I am of Cephas' crowd would constitute 'Jerusalem' Christians: Jewish believers who challenged Paul's apostleship on account of his seeming laxity toward the Law and circumcision (the group that Paul had to deal with throughout his missionary and church-planting region). Because the apostle is emphasizing the nature of the *church* at Corinth, he mentions only himself and Apollos as two who *planted and watered* – founded and nurtured – the church at Corinth.

Paul moves quickly between metaphors from *field* to *building*. The shift parallels the shift from what Paul and Apollos did – *planting, watering, tending God's field* – to what the church at Corinth is – *a building*. The apostle wants to move the focus quickly away from Apollos and himself in order to get to the main point of the whole epistle: what the church *is*, and consequently how believers ought to live in that church. So, in the first place, he shows that neither himself, nor Apollos, nor Cephas *deserve* any special attention or following. They are just servants; it is God's field. Fee points out how

the Greek emphasizes God and de-emphasizes both the planter and waterer, as well as the believers who are the field. “In the Greek text the emphasis is altogether on God: ‘God’s we are, being fellow workers; God’s field, God’s building, you are.’”<sup>33</sup> In the second place, he will show how unnatural and destructive such an attitude of division and favoritism is to God’s building, the Temple of the Holy Spirit. There is but one foundation and one building upon that foundation, and that building is the true Temple of God’s Holy Spirit. Thus the apostle shows how division within that building, just as division within a physical building, can only lead to disaster. And in this case, because of the nature of the building, it will also lead to destruction to the one who thus destroys God’s Temple.

But if the ‘field’ and the ‘building’ are metaphors, why not also the ‘temple’? This is exegetically possible, and has been put forward by modern scholars as the true meaning of what Paul is saying. However, N. T. Wright points out that such a usage of the temple imagery – as a figure of speech – would be both very misleading and very unlike a former Pharisee. It would be misleading on account of the eschatological promise from the prophets, especially from Ezekiel, of a reconstituted Temple in which the presence of YHWH would again be with His people. And it would be highly unlikely that so staunch a Pharisee as the former Saul of Tarsus would play fast and loose with the Temple in his writings. Wright concludes,

This imagery is anything but an incidental metaphor (which is how many commentators have treated it in the past). An erstwhile Pharisee would be unlikely to toss around the idea of the Temple, so central to the Judaism of the period, as one image among many. The stress on the Temple’s holiness in all three passages [i.e., Paul’s references to the church and believers as the Temple in both I and II Corinthians], and on the building of the Temple in the first of them, indicates that it is indeed Israel’s Temple that Paul is thinking of, and we are therefore not merely encouraged but compelled to take these passages as an indication of the strange fulfillment of the ancient Jewish hope. YHWH has returned at last, but not as the pillar of cloud and fire, and not to dwell in Herod’s Temple in Jerusalem. His powerful, personal presence has come to inhabit his people, turning them individually into walking temples and corporately into a single body de-

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<sup>33</sup> Fee; 134.



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signed for praise, holiness and sacrifice. This is the long-awaited temple, inhabited personally by the long-awaited God of Israel.<sup>34</sup>

To understand Paul's teaching on life in the church one must first comprehend just how fully the apostle viewed the Resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit as the complete fulfillment of the eschatological, messianic hope of Israel. Thus fulfilled, these Old Covenant promises of a New Covenant community are the essence of the Church and of every local manifestation of it. Death has been defeated and the Spirit of God has



Herman Ridderbos (1909-2007)

been poured out upon God's people. Sin has been atoned and the presence of God is now in the midst of His people through the Holy Spirit. In relation to the Church, Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Ridderbos correctly answers the discontinuity/continuity question: "The new definition of the essence of the church does stand in absolute contrast to the legalistic-synagogical concept of the New Covenant and the people of God, but not in contrast – and all the emphasis must now fall on this – with the intention God himself had from the beginning with the calling and formation of Israel as his people."<sup>35</sup> The Church is the New Temple – the full and final Temple – of the presence of YHWH by His Spirit with His people. This places the Person and work of the Holy Spirit front and center in our discussion, exactly as it is in the Pauline epistles.

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<sup>34</sup> Wright; 1074.

<sup>35</sup> Ridderbos, Herman *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1975); 341.

**Lesson 3 – God’s Building...Is Not a Building**  
**Text: Ephesians 4:4-16**

*“The building of stone, mortar, wood, or any other construction  
is not the church,  
and strictly, should not identified by that designation.”  
(John Murray)*

On December 29, 1170, four knights believing themselves to be on an errand straight from their liege, King Henry II of England, entered Canterbury Cathedral and struck down the Archbishop, Thomas à Becket. The firestorm of protest that assailed the king after this murder was enough, it seemed, even to humble him, though political assassinations, even of prelates, was not unheard of in the day. What magnified the crime was the fact that it took place in a church – a ‘sanctuary’ in which all men fleeing from assailants (or even justice) could seek refuge and be guaranteed physical preservation. The idea of ‘sanctuary’ predates Christianity and can be found in the records of pagan Rome and Greece. The temple or church building possessed a sacrosanct aspect that provided the protection of God or the gods for anyone who attained within its walls

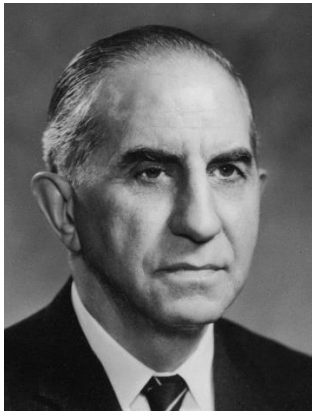


Quasimodo rescuing Esmerelda

before his or her pursuers caught up. In the novel, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, the hunchback Quasimodo rescues the damsel Esmerelda from imminent execution and then flees to the cathedral, crying out ‘Sanctuary!’ when he had brought her there. The practice of ‘sanctuary’ began to die out with the coming of the Protestant Reformation and the recognition that it was no longer security for the poor and disenfranchised but was being increasingly used by wealthy noblemen seeking to avoid responsibility for their crimes against their liege lord. Still, as late as 2019 a church in the Hague held services around the clock for ninety-six days in order to protect immigrants sought by the authorities. This was based on a current Dutch law prohibiting law-enforcement offic-

ers from entering a place of worship during a service.<sup>36</sup> This latter example is perhaps more analogous to ecclesiastical filibuster than to the medieval practice of ‘sanctuary,’ though it still illustrates the point that many over the centuries have associated a particular sacredness to the physical building called ‘the church.’

Did not Paul himself call the church ‘God’s building’? Did not Peter speak of the church as a holy habitation built from ‘living stones’? We recognize these passages to be



John Murray (1898-1975)

metaphorical, yes, but many believers today still think of the building in which Christians meet as something more holy than, say, a community center or fire station. We have established norms of both dress and behavior ‘suitable’ for ‘the house of God.’ And while certain places do retain a higher level of decorum than others (hopefully one does not behave in a home with the same excess as is regularly found in a bar), there is a great danger in assigning sacred properties to a building when that building houses the ‘building of God.’ Scottish Presbyterian theologian John Murray, never known to mince words, is quite blunt in this regard: “The building of stone, mortar, wood, or any other construction is not the church, and strictly, should not be identified by that designation...The building is the meeting-house, and the church is the assembly, the congregation, the fellowship.”<sup>37</sup>

If we think about it, it soon becomes apparent that the idea of the church as a building is thoroughly anachronistic when applied to the Pauline ecclesiology: *the church did not own any buildings in the first century*. This faulty reasoning lies behind the Reformed concept of ‘formal’ or ‘stated’ meetings of the church, and ‘informal’ or ‘house-church’ gatherings. In order to get around some uncomfortable things that Paul says, particularly about the role of women in the worship, many have taken recourse to this separation of formal and informal. But Thomas Schreiner is certainly correct when

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<sup>36</sup> [Dutch church's three-month service protected refugee family | CNN](#)

<sup>37</sup> Murray, John *Collected Writings of John Murray: Volume 1* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust;1976); 237

he disallows this unbiblical ‘solution.’ Speaking in reference to Paul’s instructions regarding women praying or prophesying in the assembly, Schreiner writes, “Some, finding this incredible, want to limit this to informal meetings – such as those taking place in homes. But this is an anachronism. Many early churches met only in homes, and there is no evidence that some meetings in the early church were considered to be ‘unofficial.’”<sup>38</sup> If we follow the historical-grammatical hermeneutic, as good Reformed theologians should, then we cannot incorporate the post-Constantinian notion of church buildings, cathedrals, and ‘sanctuary’ into our ecclesiology. When Paul used the word ‘church’ – *ekklesia* – he was certainly not thinking of a brick & mortar structure. Even when the apostle refers to the church as a ‘building,’ his thinking is wholly in line with Peter’s – it is a *spiritual* building comprised of *living stones*.



Thomas Schreiner (b. 1954)

*Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*  
(I Peter 2:4-5)

‘Living’ is a very good descriptive word for Paul’s view of the Church, and of churches. Far more than the building metaphor – used, it should be noted, primarily with reference to the work of ministers such as himself and Apollos, rather than the body of believers *per se* – the apostle utilizes living figures of speech, most frequently among them is the physical body. Foremost among these is the lengthy passage concerning life in the church found in I Corinthians 12 – 14, a passage that will be referenced often in this study. But there is a more succinct, yet comprehensive metaphor that Paul utilizes in reference to the Church, one that is perhaps even more fundamental to the apostle’s ecclesiology than the more familiar, and more controversial, Corinthians pericope. That passage is Ephesians 4:11-16, the focus passage of this lesson.

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<sup>38</sup> Schreiner, Thomas R. *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 2001); 403.

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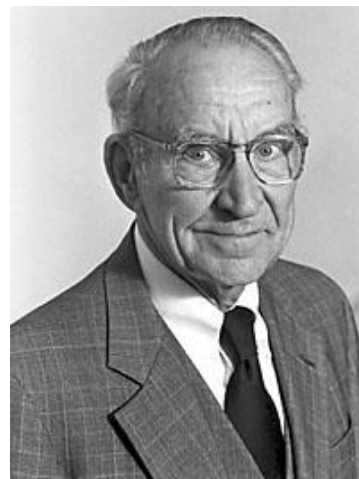
*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:11-16)*

As with all of Paul's writings, this passage is quite loaded with meaning and application. The emphasis in this lesson, however, will be on the one short phrase, "to a perfect man" in verse 13. What is further significant about this passage is that Paul, in just few verses, summarizes the Church from its foundation to its ultimate goal. In Paul's ecclesiology, the Church is referred to as a single 'man.' It will become apparent that this 'man' is Christ – the Head of the Body. But the significance of Paul's usage of the Body of Christ image becomes far more practical when one considers the many things he has to say about the Body as *one Man*. For instance, the passage in Ephesians 4 is merely the development of the apostle's soteriological and eschatological discussion earlier in Chapter 2. Having rehearsed the historical reality that the Gentiles were once "separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world," Paul announces what God has done through the Cross:

*For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself **one new man** from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. (Ephesians 2:14-18)*

Here the 'one new man' must refer to a new humanity in Jesus Christ, the last Adam. The first 'man' was divided because of sin, and enmity had grown up among the tribes of the earth, with only Israel among them being chosen as the vessel of God's re-

demptive purpose, the ethnic channel through which the ‘Seed of Woman’ would come. Paul is consistent in his usage of the term ‘man’ throughout his epistles – the ‘old man’ being Adam, or the fallen race, and the ‘new man’ being Christ Jesus, or those who are redeemed in Him. There was only one ‘first man,’ and likewise there is only one ‘new man.’ Paul Minear writes, “Because it was the one body of the one head, all types of societal divisions that had dominated ‘the old nature and its practices’ must be surrendered, permanently and completely.”<sup>39</sup> Because sin has been dealt with through the ‘new man’ Jesus Christ, the prior separation of the peoples of the earth no longer pertains: there can no longer be ‘Jew or Greek,’ ‘slave or free,’ ‘barbarian, Scythian, etc.’ but only one equal and new humanity in Jesus Christ, the New Man. This is the context from Colossians where we read Paul’s elimination of all such distinctions within the Church.



Paul S. Minear (1906-2007)

*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.*

(Colossians 3:1-11)

This passage makes explicit that the old distinctions are erased in the new man, who is Christ, “*all in all.*” Schreiner writes, “God’s intention for humanity has been realized in Jesus Christ, the second Adam. He is the ‘one new man’ of whom Jews and Gen-

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<sup>39</sup> Minear, Paul S. *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press; 1960); 211.

tiles become a part through faith (Eph. 2:15). The ‘new man’ whom believers are to put on (Eph. 4:24) is the second Adam, while the ‘old man’ whom they are to put aside is the first Adam (Eph. 4:22).<sup>40</sup> This truth underlies all of the apostle’s practical instructions to believers as to how to live their lives now in Christ. “Paul summons believers to live new lives since they have ‘put off the old man’ (Col. 3:9) and ‘put on the new’ (Col. 3:10).”<sup>41</sup>

Schreiner refers to the ‘new man’ as Jesus, and this is correct. But Paul also refers in Ephesians 2:15, to the ‘*one new man*’ as the Church and we should not lose the significance of this as it informs the Pauline concept of ‘life in the church’ pretty much completely. We are talking about a new humanity, a new people who are now ‘in Christ’ just as truly as the old and current humanity is ‘in Adam.’ The transfer from the one ‘man’ to the other is made by the same divine agent who was the instrument of Creation and the life force creating the first ‘man’ as a ‘*living soul*’ – the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the concept of the Church, and local churches, as *pneumatic communities*, is of the essence of the Pauline Ecclesiology and is fundamental to the apostle’s understanding of ‘life in the church.’ Reference to the Holy Spirit is in the passage just quoted from Ephesians 2, “*for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.*”<sup>42</sup> The ‘*we both*’ refers, of course, to the primary distinction of the world since the call of Abram: Jews and Gentiles. Paul begins this line of thinking not here in Ephesians 2, but in the first chapter.

*...that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.*

(Ephesians 1:12-14)

What God has done both through Jesus Christ and by the working of the Holy Spirit is the foundation of Paul’s understanding of what the Church is, or who she is,

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<sup>40</sup> Schreiner; 154.

<sup>41</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>42</sup> Ephesians 2:18. Notice how often Paul uses this trinitarian formula.

and also the reason why, to him, the very notion of division in the church was inconceivable. Fee writes, “That is, in the Spirit we are united as one in God’s own presence; and also by the Spirit God’s presence is manifest on earth in the community of faith.”<sup>43</sup> The work of the Holy Spirit is no less important than that of Jesus Christ – one, to be sure, is foundational; the other operational. But neither is dispensable. “On the one hand, Christ’s death made the new humanity, the one body, a possibility; and he accomplished this by abolishing that which divides. But the realization of this ‘one body’ comes through their being one people together in the one Spirit of God.”<sup>44</sup> This is exactly how Paul introduces our focus passage from Ephesians 4,

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.* (Ephesians 4:4-6)

The structure of this passage is catechistic: it is evidently intended as a summary of biblical ecclesiology formatted in trinitarian parallelism, designed to help believers understand succinctly what is the true nature of the Church, the Body of Christ. Gordon Fee offers a useful diagram of the passage, pointing out that Paul does not use either conjunctives or verbs in the text:

One body  
and  
One Spirit  
    even as also you were called  
                                    in one hope of your calling

One Lord  
One faith  
One baptism  
One God and Father of all  
    who is                      over all  
                                    and  
                                    through all  
                                    and  
                                    in all.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Fee; *God’s Empowering Presence*; 682.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*; 683-84.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*; 702.



This passage removes any consideration of an independent Christian, a professing believer who has no association with a church body. Such a person may profess *one Lord* but fails to acknowledge *one body* and therefore practically denies the *one Spirit* who is both the divine agent of his calling as well as the divine introduction into the *one body*. Schreiner comments, “Paul was not a Western individualist who indulged in a privatized Christianity. Nor did he conceive of the church as an embarrassment or a necessary evil. The church enshrined God’s plan for history, revealing to all creation the wisdom and depth of God’s saving plan. The church is the locus of God’s glory, the theater in which he displays his grace and love.”<sup>46</sup> Though the church in modern thought has become a ‘voluntary society,’ it was not so to the Apostle Paul.

Fee writes, “Paul follows ‘one Lord’ by enumerating two ‘entry’ experiences, whereby believers become associated not only with their ‘one Lord,’ but also with the ‘one body.’”<sup>47</sup> There are several facets of the metaphor ‘Body of Christ’ that Paul develops in different places in his writings, but perhaps the most obvious and pervasive is that of *connectivity* and *unity* – and these are meant to be included as a pair. The unity of the body is due to its connectivity with the head, and because the body is connected to the head, it is one and not many bodies. It was also inherent in the nature and purpose of the Church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Fee writes, “Thus, the reason for walking worthy of their calling by maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is that they (Jew and Gentile alike) are *one body* (2:16), made so because of their common experience of the *one Spirit* (1:13-14; 2:18), who serves for them as the surety of their *one hope* (1:14), the final eschatological outcome of their calling (1:18).”<sup>48</sup> Thus unity and fellowship within and among believers in a congregation becomes a necessarily fundamental theme in the Pauline corpus: there were many doctrinal issues that the apostle was willing to minimize, but the issue of unity was front-and-center with him. A disunified body was, to Paul, an unacceptable situation, a contradiction in terms.

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<sup>46</sup> Schreiner; 338-39.

<sup>47</sup> Fee; 704. Fee also notes the significant connection between ‘faith’ and ‘baptism’: “such an enumeration indicates that baptism was the immediate – and universal – consequence of faith in Christ.”

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 703.

### A Living Body

But in terms of this particular lesson, the aspect of the ‘body’ metaphor that must be further developed is that of the body as a *living organism*, a growing, dynamic, and functioning entity – not a static, brick & mortar structure. In the Ephesians 4 passage that is our focus here, Paul speaks of the ‘*gifts of men*’ that Jesus Christ has left for the church, “*for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.*” ‘Building up’ in this and all other Pauline contexts is the Greek *oikodomein*, which is a verbal modification of the word ‘house.’ It is consistently translated ‘to build up’ and often rendered by the English, ‘edify,’ which literally means to ‘raise an edifice.’ Minear writes,

The Greek student will immediately recognize that the same Greek word (*oikodomē*) is translated by the English nouns ‘building’ and ‘edification.’ To most English ears there is a sharp contrast between these. When we hear the latter word we seldom visualize a company of stonemasons engaged in cementing stones into a structure. But to edify is to build, to join stones and timbers into a strong house. What edifies the church builds the church.<sup>49</sup>

Thus Paul, who opens with what constitutes a hymn of orthodoxy regarding the *oneness* of the Church in Ephesians 4:1-6, moves into the integral and necessary *diversity* of the one body. It is very important to keep these two parts of the chapter together, for the vision that God has given Paul for the life of the Church is one of *unity in diversity*, with the glue, as it were, that holds it all together being the Holy Spirit. Paul seems to move from the catholic, or universal, Church to the local congregation when he sets forth the “*gifts of men*” that Christ Jesus has given: “*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.*”<sup>50</sup> The structure of this sentence would indicate that there are not five, but four gifts of men given to the church. He uses the Greek combination particles, *men...de* to indicate a summary list of different and distinguishable parts. But the formulaic *de* is listed in front of each of the

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<sup>49</sup> Minear; 164.

<sup>50</sup> Ephesians 4:11

## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

individual gifts *except* ‘teacher,’ where we find the more common conjunction *kai*, or ‘and.’ To illustrate this in a combination of the Greek and the English:

*And these He gave:*

*Some on the one hand [Gk. ‘men’] as apostles*

*Some on the other hand [Gk. ‘de’] as prophets*

*Some on the other hand [Gk. ‘de’] as evangelists*

*Some on the other hand [Gk. ‘de’] as pastors and teachers*

The first three of these have traditionally been associated with men whose portfolio, as it were, was the church-at-large, the ‘catholic’ church. We might refer to these as gifts of men from Christ Jesus *to the Church*. This order from catholic to local might be paralleled in a similar passage in I Corinthians 12, though the gifts listed in Ephesians 4 do not correspond point-by-point.

*And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?*

(I Corinthians 12:28-29)

We will have opportunity to consider Paul’s apparent prioritizing of the gifts in the I Corinthians passage in a later lesson on the *charismata* of the Holy Spirit. The significance here is the notice of *apostles* and *prophets* as being foundational in the ‘building up’ of Christ’s Church, a note that is even clearer in Ephesians 2, in another passage that speaks of the Church as the building of God.

*Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.*

(Ephesians 2:19-21)

It is commonplace to interpret Paul’s “*apostles and prophets*” as the apostles of the New Testament and the prophets of the Old, but the word order does not support this, nor does his other references, already quoted above, to apostles and prophets *in the church*. Taken together, then, these three passages indicate that the gifts of apostles and

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of prophets was intended by Christ Jesus to be foundational to the establishment of the Church. We might reasonably add the evangelist, then, as instrumental in the spread of the Gospel and the planting of the Church among *every tongue, tribe, and nation*. That leaves us with the fourth gift, the combination ‘*pastor and teacher*’ from Ephesians 4:11. The word translated ‘pastor’ is the Greek for ‘shepherd’ and indicates the scope of the man’s work: *the flock*. We will see in a future lesson that this function was inculcated by Paul himself into the role of the *elder* or *overseer* of the local congregation, as he exhorts the Ephesian elders in Acts 20.

*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*

(Acts 20:28)

The combination of *pastor* and *teacher* in Ephesians 4:11 may be Paul’s manner of first stating the function of the gift, and then its form. Pastors *shepherd* by *teaching*. But, again, this will be expanded in a lesson on the polity of the local congregation later. For our current purposes, it is the *goal* of this instruction and these gifts that concerns us most, which is elaborated in Ephesians 4:12, “*For the equipping of the saints to the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.*”

As we analyze this verse, let it be noted that the original Greek text did not include punctuation; the biblical Greek did not have periods, commas, and question marks. Thus our translations are, as all translations are, at least partially interpretation as well, since the translator must include the common punctuation to render the text comprehensible in English. Here, however, we have a controversial comma, found in the King James Version but removed in most modern English translations. We might refer to this as the ‘Clerical Comma,’ because it assigns tasks to the ‘clergy’ – the pastor-teacher – that Paul’s subsequent explanation would seem to assign to the members of the body themselves. Here is how Ephesians 4:12 reads in the King James,

*For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*

The comma in question is found after the first clause, *For the perfecting of the saints*. By placing a comma here, the translators assign three tasks to the pastor-teacher, rather than just one. With the ‘Clerical Comma,’ the pastor-teacher (1) *equips the saints*, (2) *does the work of the ministry*, and (3) *builds up the body of Christ*. It is the second of these ‘tasks’ that earns the comma the title of ‘clerical,’ as it establishes a hierarchy within the church with respect to ‘the work of the ministry.’ On the other hand, the passage reads much differently and, we hope to show, more in line with what Paul goes on to say immediately following, *without* the offending comma. Without the comma the pastor-teacher really has but one task assigned to him: *to equip the saints*. This equipping, which we believe to be done through the mechanism of teaching, then enables the saints to *do the work of the ministry*, with the end result being, *the building up of the body of Christ*. “Edification becomes a reality through proper teaching and comprehension.”<sup>51</sup> That this is the correct analysis of Paul’s thought is confirmed by the shift in metaphor from the building to the living organism, the analogy of the physical body, in verses 13-16.

*...till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

Paul moves from the metaphor of ‘building’ to that of ‘growing,’ showing that God’s building, the Church, is composed, as Peter states, of “*living stones*.” The Church is an organic body, not an inanimate building, and the growth of the body is furnished through the teaching of the truth, the manifestation of love, and the contribution that each individual member makes to the whole. “The body grows through the contribution of each and every individual part. The smallest ligament and tendon makes a difference, as anyone who has injured one knows!”<sup>52</sup> There is no room here for the ‘Cleri-

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<sup>51</sup> Schreiner; 354.

<sup>52</sup> *Idem*.

cal Comma,' for a clergy-laity division in the church by which the 'work of the ministry' is done by one class of believers while the other class looks on passively. No, the heart of Paul's understanding of the life of and in the church is the Holy Spirit gifting each and every believer *to the work of ministry* that the body might *grow up* into a *perfect man*, the image of the Head, Jesus Christ. Note, again, that the 'perfect man' is singular here, further evidence that individual Christian sanctification was not viewed by the apostle as something separate from and independent of the edification and growth of the whole body. *That* aspect of Paul's teaching will come out in its greatest strength in the key passage on the *charismata* in I Corinthians 12 - 14.

The key to this particular lesson, from Ephesians 4, is verse 16. This verse powerfully contradicts the 'Clerical Comma' and any form of clericalism in the church. The growth of the body is due to that which "*every joint provides.*" The purpose of the Holy Spirit, who is the enervating force in the Body of Christ, was never to empower a few to "*do the work of the ministry*" and, inevitably, to "*lord it over*" the flock. Rather it is the clear and powerful teaching of the Apostle Paul, in each of his letters, that *all* believers are not only indwelt by the Spirit of God but have been gifted by that same Spirit *for the building up of the body*. As Paul puts it here in Ephesians 4:16, "*according to the effective working whereby every part does its share.*" Movement away from this biblical model has led to the institutional church, the 'professional' clergy, and - to continue Paul's physical metaphor - the complete atrophy of the parts of the body. It has turned the majority of believers into spectators at church and has denied the *charismata* granted to every believer. This situation cannot help but retard the growth of the church, causing it to become petrified to the point of *rigor mortis* in its members.

Ephesians 4:11-16 is an executive summary for the teaching of I Corinthians 12 - 14. Here the apostle succinctly states the purpose of the divine, pneumatic gifts and clearly inculcates the principle often referred to as 'every member ministry.' But there are several caveats that flow from Paul's teaching and must be established before further investigation of the 'pneumatic' or charismatic nature of the church. The first caveat is that Paul was not a 'leveler.' It was not an egalitarianism that pervaded the Pauline

churches, in which all distinctions of both persons and gifts is obliterated. He will himself make distinctions between the charismata and will designate some as more desirable than others, some as more foundational than others. He will also make clear that no one has all the gifts, nor is any one gift necessary for all to possess. There is diversity in giftedness according to the intention of the Holy Spirit, as there is diversity in the physical body. But all is to work together in organic unity, for the growth of the body. The church is not epileptic.

The second caveat is that the presence and operation of the charismata did not preclude structure and organization within the Pauline churches. Chaos and anarchy were not, to Paul, gifts of the Spirit. There has arisen a false notion that a church can either be charismatic or structured, but not both. But even a cursory reading of that key 'charismatic' passage – I Corinthians 12-14 – will prove that the apostle, while by no means disparaging the charismata, nonetheless admonished structure and order within the congregation. The (in)famous Presbyterian polity cry, "*all things decently and in order*" is a quote from I Corinthians 14:40 and stands in the same pericope as the admonition to "*earnestly desire the greater gifts.*"<sup>53</sup> Schreiner is correct to note, "The Pauline churches were charismatic but they were also structured. *Charisma* and structure are not mutually exclusive. Dependence on the Spirit does not exclude order and structure."<sup>54</sup> This is a very important observation concerning Paul's view of life in the church. Just as the apostle did not conceive of an *individual* Christianity, he also did not conceive of a church that was not *charismatic*, nor one that did not do "*all things decently and in order.*"

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<sup>53</sup> I Corinthians 12:31

<sup>54</sup> Schreiner; 384.

**Lesson 4 – *E Pluribus Unum***

**Text: I Corinthians 12:12-27**

*“Unity was not uniformity;  
it was neither the source of uniformity nor served by it.”*  
(Paul Minear)

Having thirteen letters, the original motto of the United States – *E Pluribus Unum* – represented the unity in rebellion of the ‘many’ people in the thirteen distinct (and often very different) colonies of British North America. The Latin phrase, which means ‘Out of the Many, One,’ has been on the Great Seal of the United States since 1782 and is still imprinted on the country’s coinage and currency. In 1956 Congress adopted a new ‘motto’ for the United States: *In God We Trust* – which has been under almost continuous attack in the courts for allegedly representing the establishment of religion by the government. Still, the old standby, *E Pluribus Unum*, remains on the Great Seal and perhaps reflects a more poignant reality – or goal – today than it did in the country’s nativity. The phrase has application to a Pauline understanding of the church, though with at least one necessary adjustment: the *one* does not derive from the *many*, as with the United States; rather, the *one* is the source of unity for the *many* in the Church, the Body of Christ. In the formation of the United States, the motto was more an attempt and encouragement *toward* unity among the disparate former colonies than a reflection of a present reality. The *one* was being formed from the *many*. But not so the Church, for it is already *one* in Christ, to whom the *many* are brought through regeneration. “This unity rests of the redemptive-historical conception of ‘the many’ as belonging to and being represented by or in the one.”<sup>55</sup> This was the essence of Paul’s teaching from Ephesians 4, as we saw in the previous lesson. There the emphasis was on *unity*; here it will be on the necessary *diversity* within the living body of Christ, the Church.

The reversal of direction between the *E Pluribus Unum* of the united colonies rebelling against England, and the Church, the Body of Christ, is a critical feature of Paul’s teaching on the church throughout his epistles. It is critical in order to avoid the

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<sup>55</sup> Ridderbos; 393.



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notion that ‘unity’ is something that the church must strive to attain, whereas Paul views it as something the church already possesses and must preserve: “endeavoring to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”<sup>56</sup> Unity in the church is not programmatic; it cannot be attained by ‘learning to get along.’ It can only be recognized as having its source and power in the *one Spirit* who alone indwells and unites the *one body*.<sup>57</sup> This aspect of true, biblical unity comes out most powerfully in Paul’s ‘body metaphor’ in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12, and furnishes us with the only solid exegetical foundation to understand the apostle’s teaching on those controversial ‘charismata’ – *spiritual gifts* – that have so often vexed the Church. As we will be focusing our attention in this lesson on the longer passage in I Corinthians 12, we present the Romans 12 passage as an introductory parallel:

*For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.* (Romans 12:4-8)

We have seen in the previous lesson that Paul conceived of the Church, including the *local* church to which he wrote, as a living organism nourished and built up by *what every joint supplies*. This is a lesson sorely needed in our age, in which individualism is the dominant theme of all philosophy and, sadly, much of Christian ecclesiology. Anders Nygren writes in connection with this passage from Romans 12, “But to be in Christ is to be *a member of the body of Christ*. A member without connection with the body would be nothing. It is a member only in relation to the body and its other mem-



Anders Nygren (1890-1978)

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<sup>56</sup> Ephesians 4:3

<sup>57</sup> Ephesians 4:4

bers. It has its existence only by the fact that it is incorporated in the body and has its function therein. So it is with the Christian.”<sup>58</sup>

Institutionalized Christianity has inserted ‘church membership’ in the local body as a substitute for what Paul is speaking of in Ephesians 4, Romans 12, and I Corinthians 12. Some Baptist denominations require *water baptism* into membership of a local congregation even if the believer had been baptized before. This is a visible substitute – and no real substitute at that – for what must be a spiritual reality. Another immersion or a piece of paper cannot replace the *charis* of God through the Holy Spirit that incorporates every regenerate believer into the body of Christ, both universally and locally. But this does not mean that the membership of every believer in the body has no visible manifestation. It is indeed an invisible, spiritual reality but it must and will become manifest in the life of the congregation through its members. That is the inescapable conclusion from Paul’s treatise in Ephesians 4. In I Corinthians 12 the apostle tells us how this all works.

The key passage in I Corinthians 12 with regard to this current lesson, is found in verses 12-27. However, these verses are themselves a conclusion drawn from the opening verses of the chapter, and it is with this earlier portion that we must begin with a brief overview.

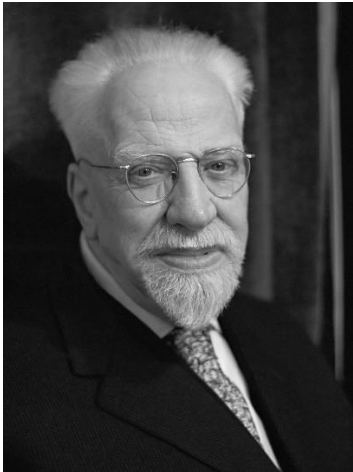
*There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.* (I Corinthians 12:4-11)

Paul’s ecclesiology is thoroughly trinitarian. It is probably most accurate to see the first three clauses in strict parallel and not to attempt to find subtle nuances of difference between ‘gifts,’ ‘ministries,’ and ‘activities.’ If anything, we may see the rela-

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<sup>58</sup> Nygren, Anders *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press; 1949); 420.

tionship between these three words as cause to effect: the *gift* of the Holy Spirit empowers the *ministry* of each individual believer in accordance with the Lord's will, producing the *activity* within the congregation that both edifies the body and glorifies God. The point of the passage, however, is not to 'grade' or 'rank' the spiritual gifts, but rather to



F. W. Grosheide (1881-1972)

remind the Corinthians – and all believers – that the distribution of the gifts is solely according to the will of the Holy Spirit, who Himself is guided by the purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no room here for either grandstanding or envy with regard to the manner in which the Spirit to distribute gifts to the members of the body. “No one, therefore, should be dissatisfied or put the one charisma above the other. That would be finding fault with the work of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>59</sup> The very name of the gift - *charisma*, which means ‘grace gift’ – precludes any boasting or jealousy, for as Paul says earlier to the same Corinthians, “What do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you had not received it?”<sup>60</sup> Dunn writes that the *charismata* are “concrete materialization of God’s grace.”<sup>61</sup> Believers cannot boast or envy with regard to grace, for every gift from God is undeserved and given wholly in accordance with His will.

Another key feature of this passage, and the one that leads directly into our subject passage immediately following, is that these various gifts are distributed *to each one individually*, even as He wills. Paul knows nothing of a ‘second blessing’ whereby a Christian receives a greater gift and calling in the church. Rather, as Gordon Fee writes, “For Paul the reception of the Spirit is the *sine qua non* of Christian life.”<sup>62</sup> And all who are born into Christ by the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit, are placed in the body

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<sup>59</sup> Grosheide, F. W. *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1953); 289.

<sup>60</sup> I Corinthians 4:7

<sup>61</sup> Dunn; *Paul*; 553.

<sup>62</sup> Fee, Gordon *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1987); 603.

of Christ as a member and, consequently, are given a ‘spiritual gift.’ This has been the chief error of the Charismatic Movement, the Keswick Movement, and all pietistic movements throughout the history of the Church that make a false distinction between ‘spiritual’ Christians and ‘carnal’ or ‘unspiritual’ Christians. There is no such thing as a Christian who does not have the Holy Spirit (*cp.* Rom. 8:9) and, according to Paul, he or she who has the Spirit has been gifted for the edification of the body.

The problem in Corinth is well known from Paul’s letter: some of the members were putting themselves above others because they possessed *charisma* that was viewed, within the congregation, as superior to others; specifically, the gift of tongues (‘glossolalia’). In dealing with this strife here in I Corinthians 12, “Paul’s point in the opening paragraph is clear. Christians differ from each other, not only in nature make-up but in the spiritual gifts distributed to each. Uniformity of experience and service is not to be expected; unity lies ultimately in the Spirit who gives, the Lord who is served, the God who is at work.”<sup>63</sup>



C. K. Barrett 1917-2011)

Because Paul views the distribution of the *charismata* by the Spirit as pertaining to *each individually as He* [the Spirit] *wills*, this distribution must follow the same principle of ‘no discrimination’ as does salvation itself. In other words, there can be no difference in Spirit-distribution on account of the old Jewish/Gentile split, nor on account of the abiding ‘free/slave’ social distinction, nor on account of the ‘male/female’ distinction seen even in the architecture of the Temple in Jerusalem. The only criteria that remains for someone to possess a *charisma* from the Holy Spirit is that he or she be in Christ and, if so, that is both sufficient and efficient cause to be thus gifted. Paul now emphasizes this remarkable – and it was in Paul’s day incredibly revolutionary – pneumatic community by illustrating it via analogy with the human body.

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<sup>63</sup> Barrett, C. K. *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers; 1968); 284.

**I Corinthians 12:12-27**

It is not enough that Paul simply state the fact of the Spirit's distribution of the *charismata* to each individual member of the local body of Christ at Corinth, he presses on with a graphic metaphor of the human body in order to impress upon his readers (in Corinth and everywhere else) the critical danger of division in the local assembly, especially division centered on 'spiritual gifts.' Not only does such schism destroy the body, it destroys God's primary symbol of grace in the presence of the world. N. T. Wright comments, "The unity of God's people in the Messiah is the most obvious worldview-symbol Paul has. That is why, in the absence of others, it matters so much to him. It is loadbearing. If this gives way, everything comes crashing down."<sup>64</sup> Thus the vivid word picture of I Corinthians 12:12-27.

*For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink [ε] into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.* (I Corinthians 12:12-14)

Paul opens his body metaphor in a very poetic way, with a chiasmic structure comparing and contrasting the unity and the diversity of the body of Christ. Fee outlines these three verses:

<i>For just as</i>	<i>the body is one,</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>yet</i>	<i>has many members</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>and</i>	<i>all the members, though many</i>	<i>B'</i>
	<i>are one body</i>	<i>A'</i>
<i>So also is</i>	<i>Christ</i> <sup>65</sup>	

Diversity in unity, without uniformity; that is Paul's understanding of the church, the body of Christ. "In saying that it is one, his concern is for its essential unity. But that does not mean uniformity. That was the Corinthian error, to think that uniformity was a value, or that it represented true spirituality. Paul's concern is for their

<sup>64</sup> Wright, N. T. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 2013); 396.

<sup>65</sup> Fee, *I Corinthians*; 601.

unity; but there is no such thing as true unity without diversity.”<sup>66</sup> This last point has been lost on the Church throughout its generations, with uniformity enforced through papal bulls, inquisitions, Acts of Uniformity, and such like. Even denominations are an attempt to achieve unity through uniformity, with each denomination possessing its own *shibboleth* of acceptance for its members – of speech, of liturgy, of dress, etc. Books of Church Order, official Prayer Books, even credal confessions are continuous attempts at unity through uniformity, and all are inimical to the apostle’s understanding of the unity of the body of Christ. Fee writes challengingly, “unity is the result of our common life in the Spirit, not of human machinations. Is it our lack of the Spirit that has forced us to attempt unity on other grounds?”<sup>67</sup>

Based on what has gone before in I Corinthians 12, we have the foundation of unity: the common work of the Holy Spirit within the body for its edification. “Here the apostle assumes that the church as a whole is the recipient of those gifts. The Spirit dwells in the church and works His gifts; the church is thereby constituted a unity but manifests a great diversity.”<sup>68</sup> The lesson that Paul is bringing to the Corinthians church and the implications of this ‘unity through diversity’ perspective, would have been quite revolutionary in the first century Roman Empire. The concept of the community as a ‘body’ was nothing new – the ‘body politic’ was a concept well developed by earlier Greek philosophers, and current Roman orators often used the body metaphor to describe the society as a whole. What would have astounded current readers was the way Paul leveled the field in terms of the roles of individual members of the body, the church. Within the Graeco-Roman concept of the civil body there were distinct and absolute preferences and hierarchy. The slave was by no means on par with the freeman, nor the woman with the man. The Roman citizen held higher rank in the civil order than the provincial, and within the Roman citizenry, the patriarchs maintained social dominance over the plebs. Any thought of doing away with these distinctions would have been rejected out of hand as utterly destructive of social order. Yet

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*; 602.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*; 607.

<sup>68</sup> Grosheide; 291.

that is exactly what Paul proposes in order to maintain and promote order within the church, the body of Christ. His justification is simple: this is the work of God through the Holy Spirit. “Where that work of the Spirit is wrought, people entirely different from one another form one body, a body which according to vs. 12 may be called ‘Christ.’ In the first century A. D. the unification of so varied a multitude was very remarkable; such a thing only took place in the Christian church.”<sup>69</sup> James Dunn adds,

The identity of the *Christian* assembly as ‘body,’ however, is given not by geographical location or political allegiance but by their common allegiance to *Christ*...The implication is clear that only when that common allegiance is given primacy in mutual relations can the potential factional differences be transformed into the necessary mutual cooperation for the common good.<sup>70</sup>

And,

Above all it is important to recognize the transition in conceptuality from a community identified by ethnic and traditional markers to a community where Christ and the Spirit were the essential distinguishing features, that is, the grace of Christ and the charisms given by his Spirit, with all that that involved.<sup>71</sup>

“The primary point is now established. Christians, who are members of Christ, constitute one body, Christ’s body. This is one metaphorical way of describing the church, but among Paul’s metaphors (planting, building, and so forth) it holds an important place, and Paul proceeds to develop it.”<sup>72</sup> Having set forth the principle of unity in diversity, Paul now employs his metaphor of the human body in two sections: 12:15-19 and 12:20-26. What seems like repetition is, in fact, shift in emphasis. The first section focuses on the diversity of the human body, while the second section emphasizes the unity. Though it may be said of the church that unity has *logical* priority over diversity (Christ, the One, has priority over His Body, the Church), it would be contrary to

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*; 293.

<sup>70</sup> Dunn; 551-52.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*; 560-61.

<sup>72</sup> Barrett; 289-90.

Paul to elevate unity over diversity simply because the former cannot exist without the latter.

*If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be?*

(I Corinthians 12:15-19)

Paul offers a series of somewhat ridiculous scenarios of communication between parts of the human body; the ludicrous nature of the statements is intentional in order to show the equal ludicrousness of any member of the body of Christ acting the same way in his or her interpersonal life in the assembly. Grosheide writes, "The truth that *the body is not one member* is universally accepted. Paul then puts into the mouth of the various members of the body statements which are absurd because they failed to appreciate the unity of the body, a unity which cannot be abolished."<sup>73</sup> It is wholly in error to attempt to link the body parts that Paul mentions with some function, gift, or ministry within the congregation; such crass literalness destroys the impact of the metaphor. Paul is simply saying that the body cannot get on without its members, and the diversity of members actually *defines* the body: "And if all were one member, where would the body be?" The metaphor, of course, is limited as it pertains to the human body, for it is possible for the human body to continue living and even prospering without individual parts. The point being rather that the proper and whole functioning of the body is dependent on every part – as Paul sets forth in Ephesians 4:16 – and the importance of each part is recognized by the whole. If the body were to lose a hand it would suffer, but Paul's point is that the hand is not more important to the body than the foot and it would be ridiculous for such comparisons to be made in the church as in the human body.

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<sup>73</sup> Grosheide; 294.



The real impact of the metaphor is that it shows how the unity of the body is not in spite of its diversity, but *because of it*. That is the summation of this first section in verse 19, which is the first application of the metaphor, though unstated, to the church: “*And if all were one member, where would the body be?*” Grosheide comments, “Suppose there were unity of all the members but that unity were ‘one member’ – then the whole could not be distinguished from its parts, but all the members would be one homogeneous mass. That would mean that the unity, the organism of the body, would not exist. The body is not just the total of the members, it is something different from the members.”<sup>74</sup> This is a crucial observation and a correct assessment of the Pauline logic in this passage. Uniformity not only does not equal or promote unity; it is, in fact, positively destructive of it.

The ‘body of Christ’ is more than just the aggregate of believers in the world or in any local congregation. It is also more than the expression, ‘greater than the sum of its parts’ would convey, for it is not the combined efforts or talents of the assembly that either constitute the body’s unity or its effective working. In the church we are not ‘stronger together’ merely as a collective rather than isolated individuals. That is true, but not for the mere reason of collectivization. The body is one because it is the Body of Christ, who is One with His body, the Church (and, in microcosm, each local church). Ridderbos comments, “it is certainly clear that Paul here again does not infer that the church is the body from its own existence as community, but precisely from Christ and from the bond that joins the church to him.”<sup>75</sup> Christ is prior in time and physical manifestation to the Church; the ‘Body’ exists, believers are baptized into it by the Holy Spirit.

This reality again prohibits absolutely the idea of division or schism within the body, the church, as it also does the idea of hierarchy or spiritual ‘stratification’ within the same body. Thus Paul shifts within his same metaphor from emphasizing the di-

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*; 295.

<sup>75</sup> Ridderbos; 371.

versity within the human body to highlighting the intrinsic and vital unity of that same body.

*But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.*

(I Corinthians 12:20-26)

Given the proximity of Paul's body metaphor to his statement at the opening of Chapter 12 regarding the *charismata*, and within the overall context of Chapters 12-14, it seems most reasonable to interpret the various body parts mentioned here as referring to the different *charismata* that the Holy Spirit has distributed within the local congregation for the edification of the whole. The universality of giftedness is a given, to the apostle, as is the diversity of those gifts. "Every gift was manifested through particular individuals and no individual entered this community without participating in a gift."<sup>76</sup> Paul's continuation of the body metaphor now emphasizes not only the diversity of the gifts within the body – and the *necessity* of that diversity for true unity – but also the solicitude that each member ought to have for the others, regardless of giftedness. As noted before, there can be no pride within any believer's heart regarding his or her gift, for that gift is a 'grace gift,' given by God through the Holy Spirit and cannot be viewed as one's own possession. Understanding both that each gift is distributed by the Holy Spirit solely according to His purpose and that each gift is to function in the body for the building up and advantage of the whole body, the believer delights in the variety of gifts and encourages both the 'noble' and 'less noble' gifts within the body. There can be 'we can get along without you' in the church any more than there is in the human body.

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<sup>76</sup> Minear; 192.

Indeed, rather than spiritual competition or jealousy there must be mutual interaction among the *charismata* just as there is in the human body – even an automatic, autonomic cooperation that manifests the human body’s unity within its diversity. Because the body of Christ is made up of individual believers, such cooperation and cohesion are not autonomic, and thus Paul exhorts the believers at Corinth to consider the fundamental purpose of the spiritual gifts – not for the aggrandizement of any individual believer, nor for the putting down of any other, but for the building up of the whole body. “Those who have been baptized by the Spirit into one body must zealously utilize whatever gift the Spirit had apportioned, but this necessity must be controlled by the truth that the building up of the church continues to be the overriding intention of the Spirit.”<sup>77</sup>

If one member of the church appears to be deficient in such gifts, this is no occasion for the rest of the church to despise him. He is not the only sufferer; the whole church suffers through the deficiency. If another member has more than the usual share of inspiration, neither should he boast nor the rest be envious and resentful. All should rejoice together in the gift God has bestowed on the one for the benefit of all, has indeed bestowed on the whole group, through the one.<sup>78</sup>

The bottom line is found in verse 24, that it is God who has fashioned the human body out of the various parts, each placed in its proper position in order to perform its proper function. While it is true that the human body can be without certain parts and still survive, while other parts are indispensable to life, the metaphor still holds that the proper growth and health of the whole body depends on the mutual interaction and care of each individual part. “God has arranged things in such a way that there should be no strife among the members of the body, who mutually need each other in order to function as a body.”<sup>79</sup> When members of the body either fail or refuse to function in harmony with other members, the body does not thereby cease to be a body even though it does cease to operate optimally. This is true of the church as well as the hu-

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*; 193.

<sup>78</sup> Barrett; 292.

<sup>79</sup> Fee; 614-15.

man body. The difference here is between the *being* and the *well-being* of the body. The *being* of the Christian body is determined by its members being *in Christ*; but the *well-being* of that body – something sorely lacking in Corinth – depends on each member utilizing his or her gift for the edification and benefit of the whole body. The emphasis of any one particular *charism* – in the case of Corinth that of tongues – causes great harm to the body, destroying its diversity and rendering it incapable of building itself up in love.

This last fact is true regardless of the gift being over-emphasized. As Fee notes, “The singular focus on one gift, be it tongues, prophecy, or healing in charismatic churches or strictly cerebral gifts in others, destroys the diversity God intended for the body.”<sup>80</sup> This is not to say that each and every church will have each and every ‘gift’ mentioned by the apostle in his various letters. There is no evidence that the gift of tongues was operative in Rome or Ephesus (though that is no argument that it was not). Nor is there any evidence from comparison of the various Pauline ‘gift lists’ that his enumeration of the *charismata* was intended to be exhaustive. To say that each congregation must have the gifts of tongues, words of knowledge, healings, administrations, etc. is to usurp the sovereign role of the Holy Spirit, who alone *distributes to each even as He wills*. It is quite possible that the *charismata* pertinent to a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Western cultural situation are vastly different from those needed by the church in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Roman Empire. And as just noted, it appears that the gifts operative in the various churches in the Mediterranean area in Paul’s day differed from church to church, no doubt according to the wisdom and purpose of the Holy Spirit.

This is one reason why ‘spiritual gift inventories’ are bogus. Not only do they usurp the role of the Holy Spirit, they assume that 1<sup>st</sup> Century ‘gift lists’ pertain to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century church. While most arguments about the *charismata* center on whether this or that give has ceased or is still operative in the church, little notice is paid to the overarching purpose in Paul’s letters: the *unity* and the *edification* of the body of Christ represented by each local congregation. This is not to say that the spiritual gifts listed in

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*; 616.

Paul's letters have ceased – we do not have biblical authority to say that – but only to reiterate the underlying function of the gifts: *unity* through *diversity* with the end result of *edification*. When Paul exhorts the believers in Corinth to *earnestly desire prophecy*<sup>81</sup> it is not because he wanted everyone in the Corinthian church to be a prophet – that would destroy his entire argument. It is rather because the gift of prophecy is more edifying for the whole body than is the gift of tongues (which he, incidentally, does not forbid nor allow to be forbidden). Earlier, when he admonishes the Corinthians to *earnestly desire the greater gifts*<sup>82</sup> he is not reintroducing a spiritual hierarchy that he has just denied. Rather he is exhorting every believer to seek the gifts that edify the body, as he will show in the immediate sequel. “The edification of the church becomes a strategic test of the authenticity of each gift. This criterion not only replaced the goal of self-enhancement and self-satisfaction, but it even reduced the importance of speaking to God or of understanding the mysteries of the Spirit. The excellence that counted most was excellence, ‘in building up the church.’”<sup>83</sup>

We will have occasion to discuss the individual ‘gifts’ and their modern equivalents and applications in a subsequent lesson. For now it should suffice to lay the foundation stones of *source* and *purpose* for all spiritual gifts in their true operation in the church: they are distributed by the Holy Spirit and are not native ‘talents’ of individual believers, and they are intended for the building up of the body and definitely not for its tearing down. Schism and envy over the *charismata* are inconceivable when one remembers that all believers are members of Christ, as Paul himself summarizes his argument by reminding the Corinthians.

*Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.* (I Corinthians 12:27)

Modern commentators view this verse in reference to the ‘catholic’ or universal church – church with a capital ‘C.’ Not only is that an evasion of the force of Paul’s argument, it renders the application of what Paul says here in I Corinthians 12, as well as

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<sup>81</sup> I Corinthians 14:39

<sup>82</sup> I Corinthians 12:31

<sup>83</sup> Minear; 193.

in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4, as impossible. Barrett writes, “Paul does not have the universal church in view but the local congregation at Corinth, in which the universal church manifests itself. The Corinthian church as such is a *corpus Christi*, an organism made by Christ and maintained by Him, having the complete character of a body as that was described.”<sup>84</sup> The thought that some churches are ‘evangelistic,’ while some are ‘discipleship,’ and others ‘benevolent’ is entirely unbiblical and un-Pauline. Each true church is a microcosm of the body of Christ universal, and the Holy Spirit has promised to gift each member of the local congregation with all *charismata* necessary to build up that local assembly. Time and setting will, of course, factor into the determination of what gifts are needed, pertaining directly to what ministries are demanded. There will be a baseline of gifts, for every congregation has need of certain *charismata* for its well-being. But there will also be differences between churches of different eras, different cultural settings, and different regions. Attempting in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to imitate the church at Corinth in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century is a foolish error as well as a usurpation of the Holy Spirit, who is the One who *distributes to each even as He wills*. Furthermore, to pretend that Corinth was the only ‘charismatic’ church in Paul’s day is naïve and ignores the work of the Spirit in Ephesus and Rome.

### **An Unrealistic Dream?**

The church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is not like that of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century and there are many today who maintain that the guidelines Paul set forth – indeed, the *definition* that Paul provides of the church – no longer apply in the modern context. Evolution has taken place in church polity and this, to many, is a good and natural development. Dunn writes of this evolutionary development in a somewhat positive way, viewing it as both inevitable and acceptable even to Paul. Dunn makes several assumptions regarding the interpretation of some of what Paul writes, but that is a subject for a different study. In general, Dunn considers Paul’s view of the *pneumatic community* as unrealistic in light of the eschatological ‘now-and-not-yet’ tensions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century world, a

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<sup>84</sup> Barrett; 297.

perspective that naturally modified into the more institutionalized church of the 2nd Century and beyond. While acknowledging that “Paul was no mere dreamer of dreams or promoter of merely idealistic blueprints,” Dunn goes on to write,

He was well aware of how far the churches to which he was writing were falling short of his vision. He may well have realized that the theology expounded was strictly speaking unrealistic in the realities of the little house churches scattered round the Mediterranean. Someone who recognized so clearly the eschatological tension, the not yet as the already, in the process of personal salvation, was hardly likely to ignore the same realities at the corporate level. The church too was caught in the overlap of the ages. In its corporate existence it was as unable to throw off the weaknesses of the corporate body of this age as was the individual to escape from the weaknesses of the physical body of this age.

It is also true that Paul’s own transforming vision was itself soon transformed, with many of its distinctive features lost to sight. His vision of the church of god as fully manifested in the local church was displaced by the thought of the Church universal (already in Ephesians). His vision of a noncultic community, lacking any distinct order of priests, was beginning to fade already in *I Clement*. His understanding of *charisma* was already being qualified in the Pastorals and disappears in the second century. His emphasis on the shared experience of the Spirit begins to be submerged beneath an understandable concern for ecclesiastical good order and sidelined as a more sectarian emphasis over the same period.<sup>85</sup>

While an accurate assessment of what did happen, is Dunn’s commentary a reasonable assessment of what Jesus Christ *wanted* to happen to His church? This falls squarely under the ‘development of doctrine’ view of Pauline theology and ecclesiology, which begs the question. Furthermore, if Dunn is correct, then large segments of Paul’s writings need to be completely ignored as hopelessly optimistic and historically outdated. It should not need to be said what this does to any reasonably orthodox view of inspiration. Dunn himself betrays a very low view of the authority of the texts we have been studying when he continues, “Nevertheless, Paul thought it important to spell out the principles of Christian community as he saw them. He took the lessons learned by many city governments and transformed them into a model for the church of God. And these principles, if they had validity in reference to the troubled churches of

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<sup>85</sup> Dunn; 562-63

Paul's mission, may still have validity for churches of later times."<sup>86</sup> Dunn reduces Paul's teachings on the *pneumatic community* to a grand metaphor of societal impact. "The point being that, as it is human embodiment which makes society possible, so the church is the means by which Christ makes actual tangible encounter with wider society...Here the vision enshrines a fundamental principle of Christian identity. Also of importance is the recognition that in the charismatic body of Christ Paul has given the church of all times a definitive model of unity and diversity."<sup>87</sup> How this model is supposed to function in the modern world, with all of the components of the Pauline church cast aside in favor of 'ecclesiastical good order,' Dunn fails to say.

If we believe II Timothy 3:16-17 we cannot accept Dunn's interpretation of the historical digression from the Pauline model as *progress*. Rather we must conclude that any movement away from the Pauline model is retrograde; it is not *development* but *corruption*. Indeed, abandonment of the Pauline view of the church is destructive of both the church's unity as well as its mission. Only as a *pneumatic community* – a community indwelt and empowered, gifted and glued by the Holy Spirit – can be the intended witness in this world to the glorious grace of God in Jesus Christ. N. T. Wright is on a far better footing than James Dunn when he writes, "what was central to Paul's worldview was the fact of a new community, a community which transcended the boundaries of class, ethnic origin, location and (not least) gender, by all of which the pagan world in general, and the imperial world in particular, set so much store."<sup>88</sup> We have to decide whether what Paul wrote about the church is normative for the church of all ages and in all regions, or simply a 'model' of unity and diversity, as Dunn maintains. There can be no doubt that the church quickly diverged from the Pauline ecclesiology, but to countenance this digression as somehow healthy and acceptable is a great leap.

Israel also diverged from the pattern established by God through Moses, but the prophets did not view Israel's deviation from the Mosaic pattern as acceptable 'development.' Rather it was the case that the prophets both chastised Israel for her unfaith-

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<sup>86</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*; 563-64.

<sup>88</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*; 383.



fulness and earnestly sought to bring her back to the right standard. Can it be any different with the church, now indwelt by the Holy Spirit? Can we view the teachings of Paul as less authoritative than those of Moses and still have a workable doctrine of inspiration? If Dunn is right, then we really have no biblical ecclesiology at all and are left to work things out as best we can according to the light that we have – a light that has often proven too dim indeed. But Dunn is wrong, and Paul is right, and “The Messiah’s people are a single family, and must strain every nerve to make that a reality that goes all the way down into their hearts and minds.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Wright; 390.

**Lesson 5 – Sacramental Unity: Baptism**

**Text: Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 3:9-11; I Corinthians 12:13**

*“The believer is one with Christ as truly as he was one with Adam –  
he dies with Christ as truly as he died with Adam.”*

(Robert Haldane)

We are forced in such a study as this to place topics in some sort of order, whereas they are interspersed within the Pauline epistles. At some point we must discuss the key rituals that visibly portray the unity that the apostle insists upon in regard to the church, the Body of Christ. These visible rites are called ‘sacraments’ or ‘ordinances’ depending on one’s view of their efficacy. If you believe that they are merely public memorials *ordained* by Jesus Christ to be done in His church on a regular basis, they are ‘ordinances.’ If, however, you consider that they possess a measure of grace bestowed in the practice, they thus become ‘sacraments’ without losing their dominical quality. In other words, an ‘ordinance’ is not necessarily a ‘sacrament,’ but a ‘sacrament,’ if commanded by Jesus, is also an ‘ordinance.’ Protestant churches accept only two of these, regardless of what they are called: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (or Communion). On the evidence of passages such as Romans 6:3-4 and I Corinthians 12:13 with regard to baptism, and I Corinthians 11:27f with reference to the Lord’s Supper, we recognize a significant grace element in these two rites and therefore refer to them as ‘sacraments.’

A general observation made be made early on in the discussion of Paul’s view to and use of the sacraments. That is, he seems to take them as given and does not spend much ink either establishing their necessity or their practice. Some have concluded that the relative paucity of material in the Pauline epistles regarding either baptism or the Lord’s Supper indicates the apostle’s relative disdain or apathy toward the two sacraments. This is strongly contradicted by the depth of what he does have to say when he does touch upon each of them. It is rather the case that both baptism and the Lord’s Supper are already established in the Christian Church upon Paul’s arrival and, as such, have no need for a further defense or explanation by him. This is evidenced in the key

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passage on the Lord's Supper – I Corinthians 11 – where Paul introduces the matter in incontrovertible terms, “For I received from the Lord that which I delivered unto you...”<sup>90</sup> Paul was in no doubt as to the source and authority of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and his thoughts on each are as deep as anything else he has written. So deep are the relatively few passages on the two sacraments in Paul's letters, that they will be taken in two lessons – and even then will suffice only for a cursory review. As it is the initiatory rite in the church, we will begin with Baptism.

Typical of Paul, however, is the difficulty of knowing where to begin with the subject. Several authors have pointed out that one's beginning point will impact one's pursuit and interpretation of *meaning*. Beasley-Murray writes, “It is possible to get started on the wrong foot with Paul's baptismal teaching. For example, an approach that starts from I Cor. 1:14ff could well assume that Paul accords a minimum significance to baptism, yet to begin with I Cor. 15:29 invites an opposite emphasis, while I Cor. 10:1ff has encouraged the view that typology is the vital clue to Paul's teaching on baptism.”<sup>91</sup> Dunn offers the same challenge to the exegesis of Paul's teaching on baptism,



George R. Beasley-Murray (1916-2000)

An important methodological question must be resolved at the outset: How are we going to set about discovering Paul's mind on this subject? It would be easy to decide on a hypothesis, and then to begin with those passages which best support that hypothesis. The other, more 'difficult' and more 'obscure' passages ('difficult' and 'obscure' so far as the hypothesis is concerned, of course) can then be interpreted in the light of the 'clear' passages. For example, on the question of baptism, by starting with I Cor. 15:29 it can be argued that Paul's view of baptism was magical; or by giving central emphasis to I Cor. 1:14-17 it can be argued that Paul gave no weight whatsoever to baptism; or by making

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<sup>90</sup> I Corinthians 11:23

<sup>91</sup> Beasley-Murray, George R. *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1962); 126.

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Rom. 6:1-11 determinative for Paul's theology of baptism a deeply mystical view of baptism can be formulated.<sup>92</sup>

If we hold both to the authority of Scripture and the consistency of its authors, there can be no contradiction between what Paul has to say on baptism to the church at Corinth, versus what he says on the same topic to the church at Rome. Therefore the only proper manner in which to analyze the data is to *avoid* establishing an *a priori* hypothesis based on one passage. Rather it is necessary to treat each passage with equal emphasis and see how their content does, in fact, harmonize – as we would expect it to, coming from the same author's pen. However, needing a place to begin, we will do so by taking the most seemingly dismissive passage first: I Corinthians 1, where Paul does seem to diminish the importance of baptism.

*I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.*

(I Corinthians 1:14-17)

Beasley-Murray writes, "If this is not a minimizing of the significance of baptism, it seems perilously close to it."<sup>93</sup> If this were all that the apostle had to say on the matter of baptism it would be pretty damning and almost impossible to conclude that he had any use for the ritual. Fortunately it is not all that Paul wrote, and in light of the other things he has to say about baptism we can arrive at a proper and more contextual understanding of what he says here in the opening lines of I Corinthians. It turns out that even here, though seemingly dismissive of the sacrament, Paul is according it a very significant place in the life of the church.

The context is rather obvious, and it is not about baptism, *per se*. The issue is division in the church, with factions developing around specific teachers: Paul, Apollos, etc. In this context it occurs to Paul that he had not personally baptized many of the believ-

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<sup>92</sup> Dunn, James D. G. *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London: SCM Press LTD; 1970); 103.

<sup>93</sup> Beasley-Murray; 178.

ers in Corinth which, in light of what baptism signifies, was probably a good thing. This is because baptism signifies a *union* between the one baptized and the one in whose name he or she is baptized. Paul posits the rhetorical questions, “*Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?*”<sup>94</sup> to show how ludicrous their schisms and factions were, not to diminish the importance of baptism. Baptism unites the person baptized with the one into whom he or she is baptized, and Paul was relieved that there were few in Corinth who could make that claim between themselves and him. Dunn writes, “*Baptizein eis to onoma* clearly means ‘to baptize into allegiance to the person named’ and indicates that baptism in the name of Christ is the formal act wherein and whereby the baptisand gives himself to Christ.”<sup>95</sup> It is taken for granted that the believers in Corinth *were baptized* and that they were baptized *in* or *into* the name of Christ and not in the name of Cephas, Paul, Apollos, or anyone else.

This is in concert with what we will see Paul writing elsewhere regarding baptism – there is no conflict between I Corinthians 1, for instance, and Romans 6. The fact that baptism unites one to another is used here by the apostle to show, again, how ridiculous was the Corinthian favoritism and faction: they were baptized *into Jesus Christ* and, as Paul rhetorically asks, *Is Christ divided?* Still, the apostle’s relative disinterest in baptism, at least as his involvement went, is instructive. The passage itself is somewhat humorous (and gives an interesting perspective on the doctrine of *plenary inspiration*) in that Paul cannot seem to remember just how many and who he did baptize. One can almost envision his secretary stopping and reminding the apostle, “Paul, remember you did baptize the household of Stephanus,” with Paul responding, “Whatever, I don’t remember who else I baptized!” Again, this does not mean that baptism was unimportant to him but only that it was not his primary purpose: “*Christ sent me to preach the gospel, not to baptize.*” Certainly, if this means anything, it means that baptism – or the administration of the ritual, at least – was not a clerical function. Preaching takes priority over baptism, mainly because baptism is not salvific; the Gospel is. “Preaching was

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<sup>94</sup> I Corinthians 1:13

<sup>95</sup> Dunn, *Baptism*; 117.

the spearhead of the Christian mission; only when evangelistic preaching had done its work would men, already convinced, penitent, and believing, seek baptism.”<sup>96</sup>

In the absence of any other passage in which the administration of baptism is localized in the hands of a clergy, we must conclude that the *administrator* is of little significance. We certainly cannot establish the necessity of so many modern denominations that baptism be administered by a pastor or priest. Nor – and this will be a disappointment to many Reformed theologians – can we establish the necessity of a sermon at the baptismal event. For Paul baptism was a matter of course in the believer’s path from sinner to saint, from outsider to member of Christ’s body. “Paul never conceived of a believer who received the Spirit and refused baptism.”<sup>97</sup> Baptism for Paul, as for the other apostles, was *in the name of Jesus Christ* and this fact underlies his theology of baptism.

I Corinthians 1 constitutes a negative statement regarding baptism; there are several other Pauline passages that are quite positive in their import regarding the sacrament. However, the field is not clear to the investigator since the apostle only uses the actual word group – *baptized, baptism, etc.* – in a very few places. And even in these the meaning is not self-evident, as some seem to be more metaphorical than others. On the one hand, some of Paul’s usage of the word ‘baptize’ or its cognates *may not* refer to the actual sacrament itself, where other passages that do not explicitly mention ‘baptize’ or ‘baptism’ do, in fact, have reference to it. As is to be expected, scholars are in disagreement on all of these points. In this study we will begin with those passages that seem to be allusions to the sacrament before moving on to those in which ‘baptism’ is explicitly referenced. The reason for this order is simply to arrive at what seems to be the clearest teaching by Paul on baptism *at the end*, with the less clear passages serving to bolster the conclusion as to the meaning of the sacrament itself.

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<sup>96</sup> Barrett, *I Corinthians*; 49.

<sup>97</sup> Schreiner; 372.

## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

The general theme of those passages that are typically associated by biblical scholars and commentators with ‘baptism’ is that of *cleansing*: the *cleansing of regeneration*. For instance, Paul writes to Titus,

*But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through **the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit**, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* (Titus 3:4-7)

The reference to ‘washing’ and ‘renewing’ are parallel statements concerning the regeneration of the believer by the power of the Holy Spirit. As such, they have immediate reference to such Old Testament promises as Ezekiel 36, and only the most tenuous reference to the New Testament sacrament of water baptism.

*Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.* (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

Still, the idea of ‘cleansing’ has an important place in Paul’s understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in the salvation/justification of a believer, and it appears that the sacrament of water baptism was early understood by the church in that regard. Consider these other passages in Paul that encompass the idea of ‘washing’ or ‘cleansing’ as integral to the event of salvation/justification.

*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.* (I Corinthians 6:9-11)

The idea of baptism as a ‘washing’ is thoroughly accredited in the Jewish writings of the time and may have had an even deeper connection to Paul on account of his own entrance into the faith. In Acts 22 Paul recounts his experience in the same terms,

*Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, came to me; and he stood and said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that same hour I looked up at him. Then he said, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.’*

(Acts 22:12-16)

The reference in I Corinthians 6:11 to the *name* of the Lord Jesus is further evidence of ‘washing’ being used as a circumlocution for baptism, though Paul is not focusing on the ritual itself; rather the result. “In the present verse the reference to *the name of the Lord Jesus Christ* makes it probable that baptism is in mind, though the use of the non-technical word...shows that it is the inward meaning rather than the outward circumstances that is important to Paul.”<sup>98</sup> In this subtly way the apostle helps to guard the sacrament of baptism against the false teaching of baptismal regeneration. Washing, renewal, regeneration are all terms that echo the wonderful gospel promise of Ezekiel 36 and it would be pedantic to insist that the apostle use but one word to describe the multifaceted impact of conversion. Indeed, if Paul were to use the technical term ‘baptism’ each and every time he mentions the event – focusing, as Barrett notes, on the outward circumstance rather than the inward effect – the error of baptismal regeneration would become orthodoxy. It is rather more reasonable to conceive of first century believers thinking of their own baptism (as Paul may have done) when they read these auxiliary words. “Regeneration and renewal are the product of the Spirit’s work in the life of a believer. On the other hand, it is hard to believe that early believers would not think immediately of water baptism when reading the words *washing* and *cleansing*. Baptism in water was a major event in the lives of new believers, functioning as a

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<sup>98</sup> Barrett; 141.



boundary between their old and new life.”<sup>99</sup> Ridderbos concludes, “the washing with water of baptism represents the new birth as the transition from the old mode of existence dominated and qualified by sin to that which derives its character from the Spirit as the eschatological gift of salvation.”<sup>100</sup>

What these more indirect passages teach us is that baptism itself represents a whole complex of thoughts and facts concerning the act of regeneration. Thus the ritual itself need not be mentioned – indeed, is better not mentioned every time lest too much efficacy be assigned to the outward act and too little emphasis be directed to the inward reality. “Baptism *does*, outwardly and visibly...what justification *says*. Justification is the declaration made by the one God himself; baptism makes that divine word tangible and visible.”<sup>101</sup> Baptism signifies, but woe to that church where the sign takes on greater importance than the thing signified. Regeneration is a work of the omnipotent Holy Spirit and not of the water of baptism, and as long as the inner reality signified by the outward sacrament is kept firmly in mind, the event of baptism cannot lose its importance or poignancy in the church.

But Paul does speak more explicitly about baptism in several passages and these are very instructive as to the apostle’s thoughts regarding the sacrament and its meaning both to believers and to the church. In these we see the emphasis on (1) the union of the believer with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection, and (2) the union of the believer with the whole Body of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Consider the *locus classicus* of Paul’s baptismal teaching in Romans 6,

*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we*

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<sup>99</sup> Schreiner; 374.

<sup>100</sup> Ridderbos; 398.

<sup>101</sup> Wright, *PPG*; 962.

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*should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

(Romans 6:1-11)

The first thing to notice about this important passage is the context. It is *not* a treatise on baptism. It is, rather, an answer to the unthinkable question posed at the opening, “*Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?*” Once again Paul takes baptism



Robert Haldane (1764-1842)

as a given, and then uses it to show how ridiculous such a thought as represented by that rhetorical question really is. “*Or do you not know...?*” Do you not know what transpired when you were regenerated, what was represented by your baptism? The baptized believer is united with Jesus Christ in His death and, consequently, also in His resurrection. Paul’s usage of the sacrament of baptism here flows logically from what he has already said about the two Adams in Romans 5.

“The believer is one with Christ as truly as he was one with Adam – he dies with Christ as truly as he died with Adam.”<sup>102</sup> Once again, baptism does not simply hang out there as a separate topic for Paul. Rather he integrates it into his overall teaching concerning regeneration – life in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Baptism never was simply a Christian ritual to the apostle and should never be so to us. *Union with Christ* is represented by water baptism (and there is no debate as to whether Paul is referring here to water baptism), and the powerful implications of that fact are drawn out in detail through the next 2 ½ chapters of Romans.

Reformed theologians are consistent in their recognition of this significance of baptism: incorporation into Jesus Christ, His death and His resurrection. It is somewhat remarkable to read died-in-the-wool paedobaptists describe Paul’s understanding of water baptism in terms that must of necessity preclude infants. Take, for instance,

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<sup>102</sup> Haldane, Robert *Romans* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust; 1996); 244.

Herman Ridderbos, a Dutch Reformed theologian and staunch defender of paedobaptism,

The function of baptism therefore consists in this, that it incorporates or implants the one baptized into this corporate ('bodily') unity between Christ and his own...Believers are implanted or incorporated by baptism into what has taken place with Christ...to be buried with him in baptism consequently means to participate by baptism in that death and in that grave...but baptism incorporates us into, makes us participate in, Christ's death on Golgotha and resurrection in the garden.<sup>103</sup>

Robert Haldane, a Scottish Presbyterian, writes, "Their baptism, then, is the figure of their complete deliverance from the guilt of sin, signifying that God places to their account the death of Christ as their own death."<sup>104</sup> And G. C. Berkouwer, another Dutch Reformed theologian, adds, "Nothing happens in and through baptism. Rather, baptism is meaningful only through its pointing at another event in which those who were dead in their transgressions are truly reconciled, in which the accusations written against them are blotted out...The fundamental fact about baptism will always be its involvement with the death of Christ."<sup>105</sup> Statements like these are agreeable to any credobaptist: baptism signifies all that regeneration represents and, unless baptismal regeneration be true (with which none of these authors would agree), baptism can only have proper application to those who have given evidence of said regeneration through a profession of faith. To say that baptism has as its 'fundamental fact' the death of Christ and then to apply it to infants is a travesty of exegesis and ecclesiology, for there is no outward evidence of this union other than the profession of faith (*cp.* Romans 10:9-10).



G. C. Berkouwer (1903-96)

Paul's language in Romans 6 is remarkably clear, though there has been perennial debate as to whether he is speaking literally or figuratively with regard to the believ-

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<sup>103</sup> Ridderbos; 403-404.

<sup>104</sup> Haldane; 245.

<sup>105</sup> Berkouwer, G. C. *The Sacraments* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1969); 117, 119.

er's union with Christ in death and resurrection. Considering the application the apostle himself makes – that on the basis of this union the believer is “*to consider (or reckon) yourself dead to sin,*” and his clear intention that this mean that the believer *no longer sin,* a figurative interpretation would be rather hollow. Furthermore, the connection between Romans 6 and the previous chapter demands the same exegesis: if the sinner's union in Adam's fall is figurative, then the whole argument of Romans 5 falls apart. But as it is literal, so also is the believer's union with Christ in His death. “Paul's first thought in this passage...is not that the believer in his baptism is laid in his own grave, but that through that action he is set alongside Christ in *His.*”<sup>106</sup> The interpretation must be literal: “it would seem that Paul speaks of our being involved directly with Christ in His death and resurrection through baptism.”<sup>107</sup>

This union with Christ in death and resurrection, then, must constitute the essential meaning of Christian water baptism, regardless of what one considers its source or heritage. There is nothing said in the Bible regarding baptism that is deeper or more fundamental than what Paul says here in Romans 6 and, once again, it can only pertain to someone who has given evidence of regeneration through profession; there can be no other valid candidate. Though it may be (and has been) true that this profession turns out to be false, there can still be no other valid candidate for the sacrament of baptism other than one who has made the profession, for this is the only evidence available to the church upon which to administer the water of baptism. “Baptism, and the Christian faith it embodies, is rooted in the ‘Christ event,’ with all that implies, and nothing of man's doing and no theological explanation must ever be allowed to detract from the uniqueness, splendour and power of that event.”<sup>108</sup>

One additional passage must be investigated in conjunction with Romans 6, and the more so because in it Paul actually mentions ‘circumcision,’ a key component in the Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed defense of paedobaptism. This passage is in Colossians 2,

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<sup>106</sup> Beasley-Murray; 130.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*; 135.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*; 138.

*In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.* (Colossians 2:11-15)

This passage is critical to the paedobaptist view that water baptism has taken the place of circumcision and, therefore, is to be administered to the children of believers. There are numerous fallacies with this logic, not the least being that circumcision was administered to male children only, whereas baptism is given to males and females (without distinction, as Paul notes). But more fundamental than that is the question whether Paul here intends for baptism to be seen as the one-to-one replacement of circumcision. It seems evident in the apostle's many letters that circumcision is no longer a significant ritual within the Christian community: *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision mean anything, but faith working through love."*<sup>109</sup> This verse, and others like it, not only remove the significance of circumcision completely, but replace it with *faith* and not with baptism. This comports with the passage above from Colossians 2, where faith is again the operative factor: *"buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith..."* Beasley-Murray writes, "so important a function is ascribed to faith here, it is difficult to see how the experience described can be held to be present without the exercise of faith on the part of the baptized."<sup>110</sup> Thus even if baptism as a rite or sacrament replaces circumcision in the Christian church, this "by no means automatically involves the corollary that the two rites have identical significance or identical administration."<sup>111</sup>

But what Paul actually says in the Colossians passage is not that baptism replaces circumcision, but that baptism represents that to which fleshly circumcision always

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<sup>109</sup> Galatians 5:6

<sup>110</sup> Beasley-Murray; 156.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*; 157.

pointed: the circumcision of the heart, made without hands. This was promised in the Old Testament as a result of the New Covenant, when God would do *within the heart* of His people what circumcision represented – a spiritual birth *of promise* (Isaac) rather than the physical birth of human will (Ishmael). Baptism now signifies that this inner heart circumcision has taken place – Paul is not prospective in his language: *In Him you were circumcised with the circumcision made without hands...by the circumcision of Christ.* “Paul is not speaking here of baptism under the figure of circumcision; he is speaking directly of the circumcision of the heart (Jer. 4.4; Deut. 10.16; 30.6)”<sup>112</sup> This is not the sacrament of baptism replacing the ritual of circumcision; it is rather the reality to which circumcision once pointed now visibly proclaimed through baptism. “Instead of characterizing the baptism that introduces to this new creation as the fulfillment of the rite of circumcision, it is better to say that it leads to the fulfillment of the prophetic hope of a spiritual circumcision.”<sup>113</sup>

What is also clear in the passage from Colossians 2, as well as all other places where Paul speaks of baptism, is the fact that *faith* is the operative element in the entire picture. Not only is the reception of Christ conditioned on faith (Col. 2:12), Paul describes the condition of regeneration in the same terms as he uses in Ephesians 2, “*And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses...*” (Col. 2:13) This entire passage speaks to the salvation of the believer – the inward reality of which baptism is the outward sign. There is no thought here of applying baptism to infants – who cannot exercise faith – on the basis of their being the children of believers. Ridderbos’ defense of infant baptism is wholly divorced from the tenor of Paul’s statements and betray a sense of vigorously attempting to fit a square peg into a round hole. Assuming that Paul’s statement in I Corinthians 7, that the children of believers are ‘holy,’ means that they are rightfully entitled to baptism, Ridderbos states,

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<sup>112</sup> Dunn, *Baptism*; 153.

<sup>113</sup> Beasley-Murray; 158.

That the children 'are holy' thus means that they, together with and belonging to their parents, were incorporated into the church by baptism and in this way participated in the gifts of Christ and the liberating rule of his Spirit. This does not of course mean that faith would for them be superfluous – such would suppose a magical operation of baptism detached from God himself – but rather that the way of faith is more plainly opened for them and the obedience of faith more emphatically demanded of them. To be sure, the criterion or human 'point of contact' for infant baptism, otherwise than in the case of adults, does not lie in the personal faith of the one baptized, but in the fact that the children belong to the parents and to the solidaric relationship represented by them. The 'implantation' takes place here on the ground of the bond that joins children to their parents...On the other hand, it is no less apparent that Paul's pronouncements on baptism presuppose faith confessed before baptism and do not start from a situation for which infant baptism is characteristic.<sup>114</sup>

Whereas Paul everywhere diminishes the influence of heritage, gender, or ethnicity, the paedobaptist introduces the Old Covenant tie of parentage. While it is true that Paul does not specifically mention this relationship as no longer holding sway in Christ, it must be denied that any of the blessings of the New Covenant are transferred by any other means than grace through faith. "Any initiation rite that links membership in the community to birth or ethnic background is a reversion to the old covenant."<sup>115</sup> Berkouwer – remarkably considering his Dutch Reformed credentials – puts the matter even more emphatically: "Any appeal to the covenant of God with Abraham apart from faith and obedience is fundamentally irreligious."<sup>116</sup>

The simple truth that Paul reflects in Romans 6 and Colossians 2, is that baptism signifies union with Christ in His death and resurrection. This is regeneration, and can be positively affirmed – inasmuch as we can know anything – only on the basis of a profession of faith. To say that baptism signifies anything other than union with Christ is to say more (and also much less) than what Paul says. "The fundamental fact about baptism will always be its involvement with the death of Christ."<sup>117</sup> Thus to baptize an infant is to signify the union of that infant with the death and resurrection of Jesus

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<sup>114</sup> Ridderbos; 414.

<sup>115</sup> Schreiner; 378.

<sup>116</sup> Berkouwer; 97-98.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*; 119.

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Christ; in other words, it is *to affirm baptismal regeneration*, even if the words are not used.

But baptism also signifies another union, and one that is founded (as we have seen) on the believer's union with Christ. This additional union is with the Body of Christ, the church, and the agent of this union is the Holy Spirit. This truth is contained in the passage that we studied in the last lesson, from I Corinthians 12.

*For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.* (I Corinthians 12:11-14)

That Paul is again speaking here of water baptism can be inferred from two points. The first is that water baptism would be the most common and natural interpretation of believers to the statement; Paul knows of no other baptism, and to read a 'Spirit baptism' in this passage is denied by the fact that the apostle views this to be the common experience of all believers, not just the 'spiritual.' The second confirmation comes from the underlying history of baptism and a statement from John the Baptist that is recorded in all four Gospels.

*And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."* (Mark 1:7-8)

Baptism is, as circumcision was, an initiatory rite that brings the recipient into the full membership of the community. "For baptism is the event in which man, having come to faith, makes a public transition from paganism and the old life of sin and death to a new life in communion with Christ. It is 'an act of admission into the church,' which follows automatically upon the faithful and believing listening to the gospel."<sup>118</sup> Schreiner adds,

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<sup>118</sup> Berkouwer; 123.



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Baptism in I Corinthians 12:13 is linked especially with incorporation into the body of Christ so that baptism involves induction into the people of God. Here we see the close association between baptism and the Spirit, demonstrating that the reception of water baptism and the reception of the Spirit occur at the same time.<sup>119</sup>

The baptized believer is one with other believers in the church, and this oneness, as we have seen, is on account of their shared experience of the Holy Spirit. That Paul also closely links baptism with the Spirit – and also *with faith* – is confirmed in a passage we have already had occasion to review: Ephesians 4,

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.* (Ephesians 4:4-6)

Baptism is, therefore, not merely a personal sacrament whereby the new believer professes outwardly what, by faith, is now true inwardly. It is indeed that; but it is more. Baptism is incorporation into the body of Christ, the church. The baptized believer is now a member of that body with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities thereunto appertaining (to borrow some legal jargon). It is baptism that signifies union with Christ and, consequently, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. And it is the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of Christ – who gifts each individual member of the body to function for the benefit and building up of the whole. “In baptism we are given the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8.9) to engage in the ministry of the Body of Christ, with the ultimate end of participation in the eschatological glory of Christ. For God who anointed us and sealed us for that glory gave us its first installment – the anointing and sealing Spirit.”<sup>120</sup> Baptism belongs to the body as much as to the believer. “Baptism is a *community-marking symbol*, which the individual then receives, not first and foremost as a statement about him- or herself, but as a statement which says, ‘This is who *we are*.’”<sup>121</sup> This statement then continues in the life of the body through the second sacrament: the Lord’s Supper.

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<sup>119</sup> Schreiner; 373.

<sup>120</sup> Beasley-Murray; 177.

<sup>121</sup> Wright, *PPG*; 421.

## Lesson 6 – Sacramental Unity: The Lord’s Supper

Text: I Corinthians 10:1-22; 11:23-33

*“Baptism is the sacrament of initiation;  
the Supper is the sacrament of continuing communion  
in the family of God.”*  
(Edmund Clowney)

The evening before his ‘final’ showdown with the Zurich Reformer, Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Luther allegedly wrote in chalk on their meeting table: *Hoc est corpus Meum* and covered it with the tablecloth. The setting was the Colloquy of Marburg in



Unknown Woodcut of the Colloquy of Marburg

1529, an attempt by the Protestant Landgrave of Hesse, Philip I, to bring the two major branches of the Protestant movement – represented by Luther and Zwingli – into agreement. Philip’s purpose was not so much theological as political: he needed agreement among the various Swiss and German Protestant rulers to counter the in-

evitable backlash from the Catholic Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. Things seem to be going well – general amity among the leading Protestant theologians gathered and agreement on fourteen of the fifteen points of discussion. Unfortunately the fifteenth point touched on the issue of the ‘Real Presence’ of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, what is more generally called the ‘Lord’s Supper’ or ‘Communion’ among modern-day Protestants. Philip could be excused for being optimistic prior to the final meeting between the ‘Big Two,’ but his optimism would have been misplaced. Luther held to a modified view of the Roman Catholic ‘transubstantiation’ while Zwingli advocated a much less mystical, ‘memorial’ and symbolic perspective on the Supper. The two views – and basically the two personalities – were incompatible. The story is told that at the dramatic moment, Luther threw back the tablecloth to reveal the words he had written there: *Hoc est corpus Meum* – “This is My Body.”

These are, of course, the words of institution of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, spoken by the Lord Jesus on the night in which He was betrayed. Their *meaning*, however – whether they were to be interpreted literally or figuratively – was a source of intense debate over the next fifteen hundred years and more. Luther claimed that he did not take them as literally as did the Roman Catholic view, but Zwingli (and many since) had a hard time discerning the difference. The Swiss Reformer had his own favorite verse on the subject, from the Gospel of John, “It is the Spirit who gives life. The flesh profits nothing; the words I speak to you are spirit and they are life.”<sup>122</sup> Timothy George summarizes the two Reformation Titans in battle over the meaning



Timothy George (b. 1950)

of Christ's Body in the Eucharist. “If ‘This is my body’ was Luther favorite text, Zwingli had one of his own, John 6:63: ‘It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail.’ This text supported Zwingli's emphasis on the direct, unmediated impartation of salvation by the Holy Spirit, and his disparagement of the ‘husks of externals.’ It became the centerpiece of his attack on Luther's doctrine of the corporeal presence of Christ in the Supper. At Marburg Zwingli quoted this verse again and again. In a heated exchange, Zwingli warned Luther that this text would break his neck! Luther replied that necks were not so easily broken in German Hesse and in Switzerland!”<sup>123</sup>

Who gets this worked up over the Lord's Supper in our day? In his Foreward to Richard Barcellos' *The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace*, James Renihan opens, “It is a curious fact that the most difficult issue under debate during the era of the Reformation was not Justification by Faith alone or even the place of the Papacy in the church. It was rather the theology and practice of the Lord's Supper. Lives were lost, much blood was shed and potential alliances failed because of differences over eucharistic observance. Romanists, Lutherans, the Swiss and the English reformers all debated the question at

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<sup>122</sup> John 6:63

<sup>123</sup> George, Timothy *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers; 1988); 152.

length....Can this be said of the twenty-first century church? Hardly.”<sup>124</sup> Modern-day believers give little thought to the Supper, possess less theology on the subject, and are largely ambivalent concerning the matter. Many view it as a tradition that the Lord commanded be observed on a regular basis, but for little other purpose than to remember His death. Many view it as archaic, a throwback to a more superstitious time, and have either modernized it with pizza and Coke, or dispensed with it altogether. Within the Reformed tradition, to be sure, the Lord’s Supper has maintained its importance, though it may still be argued that the rank & file members of Reformed churches would be hard-pressed to give a coherent definition or explanation of it. We do it, because Jesus told us to do it; not unlike most professing believers’ view of baptism.

The issue that confronted the Reformers, and that is so little considered today, is the ‘Real Presence’ of Jesus in the Supper. On that last night of His earthly life, Jesus did say “*This is My body,*” and it has occupied the thoughts of countless pastors and theologians across the centuries to figure out what exactly these words mean. Does this mean that Jesus is *literally* present in the bread and the wine, as Rome teaches with their doctrine of *transubstantiation*? Or, if the words are to be taken figuratively, can we say that Jesus is present *at all* with the partakers of the bread and the cup? Zwingli struggled with this. Or do we take a mediating position, as Luther did, saying that the resurrected body of Jesus is *ubiquitous* and is therefore ‘in, with, and under’ the bread and the cup? Speaking of Luther and Zwingli’s successor as leader of the Swiss Reformation, John Calvin, Berkouwer writes, “While rejecting the doctrine of transubstantiation, they both, albeit in a different manner, confessed the real presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>125</sup> Zwingli reasoned that the believer communed with the Lord *by faith*; Luther argued that the Lord must be truly present for that communion to occur. Calvin traveled a *via media*. The arguments were heated and the disagreements lasting and costly to the Protestant cause. The irony of this is not lost on Berkouwer: “It remains one of the most pathetic features of the history of the Lord’s Supper that there has been

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<sup>124</sup> Barcellos, Richard C. *The Lord’s Supper as a Means of Grace: More than a Memory* (Mentor; 2013); 11.

<sup>125</sup> Berkouwer *Sacraments*; 206.

so much controversy about a sacrament that is so eminently the sacrament of communion.”<sup>126</sup>

Another irony is the reality that the Apostle Paul had very little to say about the sacrament. Indeed, if it were not for his comments to the Corinthian church, we would not know that ‘his’ churches observed the Lord’s Supper at all. Of course, and as with baptism, what the apostle does say about the Lord’s Supper makes it clear that the sacrament was a given in all his churches, an ordinance handed down to Paul by the Lord Himself. It should also be remembered that the little that Paul has to say about the Supper is chronologically the *first* that was written to the church, since the Gospels were by common consent written *after* the epistles. So we are left with an initial teaching concerning the sacrament that really is not a teaching on the sacrament itself, but rather a polemic against the manner in which the Corinthian church was wrongly observing it. Still, even as polemic, Paul’s few paragraphs on the Lord’s Supper dovetail wonderfully with his overall teaching concerning the nature of the church, both universally and (especially) locally. And even though they do not constitute a systematic doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, these passages do provide an indispensable insight into the sacrament’s deeper meaning for the local church body.

### **I Corinthians 10 – The Example of Israel**

It would seem logical to begin with what Paul has to say in I Corinthians 11, since that is where he reiterates the establishment of the sacrament itself: “*For I delivered to you that which I received from the Lord, that on the night He was betrayed...*”<sup>127</sup> But as that is not where Paul started, we will assume an inner logic to his letter and seek to follow it. Indeed, the apostle has been talking indirectly about the Lord’s Supper – or ‘Communion’ – throughout the letter, but only begins to speak of it explicitly in Chapter 10, in verse 16.

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*; 279.

<sup>127</sup> I Corinthians 11:27

*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?* (I Corinthians 10:16)

The manner in which the apostle speaks of *the cup of blessing which we bless* and *the bread which we break* would have resonated with any Jewish readers and, since there was not a large Jewish population in Corinth, probably simply flowed from Paul's own heritage. Every Jewish meal begins and ends with a blessing spoken over a cup of wine, and bread was usually a common loaf broken as it was shared around the table. It is a poignant image represented millions upon millions of times at family meals. The technical term for it is 'table fellowship,' and in the ancient as well as the modern world, it is the most intimate of human association. But in the Lord's Supper there is another present, for the cup and the bread are *communion* with the blood and body of the Lord Jesus Christ. This word *communion* is very important to our understanding – or at least an insight into Paul's understanding – of the sacrament itself. The word is familiar to most believers: *koinonia*.

The word can have several meanings and is sometimes translated 'communion,'



Ernest Kevan (1903-65)

sometimes 'fellowship.' It has the basic sense of *participation* together and does signify a close association between the two people or groups. But etymology only ever gets us so far in the study of any text, as Ernest Kevan points out in his little treatise, *The Lord's Supper*. "May I remind you again that a word has its meaning, not only by etymology, not merely by definition, but by its use."<sup>128</sup> It is indeed the use of the term *koinonia* here in I Corinthians 10 that determines the word's meaning, and that not merely in regard to the Lord's Supper.

The apostle is making a comparison and a contrast between two types of meals: the Lord's Supper and the pagan sacrificial feasts that were so common in the Græco-Roman world. What the apostle has to say to the believers in Corinth in verses 16 and 17 is not within the context of a doctrinal study on the sacrament of the Lord's Supper,

<sup>128</sup> Kevan, Ernest F. *The Lord's Supper* (London: Evangelical Press; 1966); 43

but rather within a very practical context of some Corinthian believers having participated in the pagan feasts. Paul's use of the word *koinonia*, then, shows just how impossible this behavior must be for a true believer in Jesus Christ.

His point throughout this chapter – and we will be moving backward to the beginning of Chapter 10 after we move forward to the next section – has been to show the utter incongruity of the behavior of some of the Corinthian members with their profession of faith in Jesus Christ and membership in His body. Perhaps the central thought in both this and the next chapter, Chapter 11, is in I Corinthians 10:12, “*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*” The Corinthians manifested a pride in their liberty, a liberty that was being used as a cover for licentiousness and idolatry. Having reminded them that the Lord's Supper – *the cup of blessing which we bless and the bread which we break* – are a communion/fellowship/participation in the blood and body of the Lord Jesus, he immediately shows how this also applies, in a distinctly and dangerously negative sense, to the pagan feasts.

*Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices **partakers** of the altar? What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have **fellowship** with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?* (I Corinthians 10:18-22)

His reference to Israel will take us back to the beginning of the chapter and is very important to fully understanding Paul's thinking on the Lord's Supper, but the important point here is his use of the same terminology in speaking of the pagan feasts at which the Corinthian members were too often present. The rendering of terms in the New King James, as with most English versions, is somewhat unfortunate in that various English words are used to translate forms of the same Greek word, *koinonia*. For instance, this word is translated ‘communion’ in both cases in verse 16, but ‘partakers’ in verse 18 and ‘fellowship’ in verse 20. This somewhat clouds what Paul is drawing out for the Corinthians' attention: when you participate in a pagan feast and eat the

meat sacrificed to the idol, you are *partaking* in that idol just as you are *partaking* in the Lord Jesus Christ when you partake of the Lord's Supper. What the apostle means by this must certainly be carefully considered, but it is evident that the Lord's Supper was to him much more than a simply 'memorial' meal.

Thus three examples are set before us that help us determine Paul's usage of the term *koinonia*. In verse 16 we have the Christian sacrament of the Lord's Supper; in verse 18 we have the analogy of the Jewish altar of sacrifice in which the worshiper partook of the meal and, as Paul maintains, of the One to whom the sacrifice was offered. Finally, in verses 19 and following, we have the immediate, practical example of the pagan feast, in which the celebrants are considered to *partake* and to *have fellowship* with the idol to whom the meat is sacrificed before the meal. Paul makes clear his dismissal of 'idols' as having inherent reality, but in the same breath he points to the reality behind the idol: demons. His point is that when we understand the true nature of *koinonia* in the Lord's Supper, participation in anything remotely similar in the pagan realm becomes impossible. "What he argues is that there is something inherent in the nature of the Christian meal that makes participation in the other absolutely impossible. That something he describes as *koinonia*."<sup>129</sup>

Thus the meaning of this term, as Paul uses it, must constitute a real presence of the one to whom the meal is dedicated and a real participation of the worshipers with that one. Fee continues, "The linguistic and literary evidence indicates that *koinonia* has to do with the worshipers themselves; but the basis and focus of their worship were the deity, who in most cases was considered to be present among them...there can be little doubt that Paul intends to emphasize the kind of bonding relationship of the worshipers with one another that this meal expresses."<sup>130</sup> The analogy that Paul is drawing between the Jewish sacrificial meal, Christian Communion, and the pagan feast is that in each the deity thus honored is considered to be present, and the worshipers to be eating the meal with that deity. "At the same time, however, the distinctively religious na-

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<sup>129</sup> Fee, *I Corinthians*; 465-66.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*; 466.

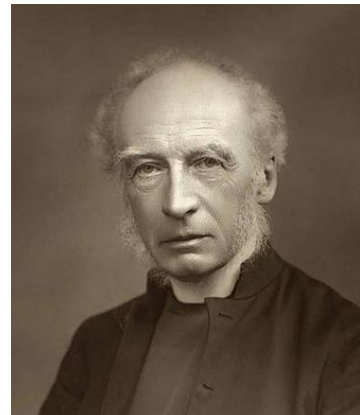


ture of these feasts indicates that *the worship of the deity* was involved, and therefore that they most likely considered him/her also to be present in some way at the meal.”<sup>131</sup> This both explains, inasmuch as possible, the ‘real presence’ of the Lord Jesus at His Supper and prohibits such a crassly literal presence as represented by the Roman Catholic or Lutheran views. No one ever considered that the sacrificial bull or goat or turtle dove *became* Yahweh by some transfiguration of substance, nor was such a view ever held among the pagan philosophers with respect to the pagan offerings and feasts. Such a thought would never had entered the apostle’s mind. *Jesus is present* at the Supper, but neither as Rome nor as Wittenberg surmise. “Not only did Jesus himself host the first of such meals, but the early church understood him to be present by the Spirit in their gatherings.”<sup>132</sup>

Underlying Paul’s perspective on the Lord’s Supper is his understanding of the church as the people of the New Exodus, the Final Exodus. This is indicated by what he writes as introduction to what we have been investigating.

*Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.*  
(I Corinthians 10:1-5)

As with many of Paul’s interpretations of the Old Testament history, this passage contains “*things hard to understand and which some unstable men twist...*” The context of the chapter fairly demands that the eating and drinking of the Israelites in the wilderness corresponds to the Lord’s Supper, but it is also apparent that the historical eating was not of bread, but of *manna*, and that which was drunk was *water*, not wine. Yet the reference



Charles Ellicott (1819-1905)

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<sup>131</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*; 467.

to the Israelites being *baptized into Moses* – corresponding to Christian baptism in Paul’s argument here – means that the *spiritual food* and the *spiritual drink* also refer to the Lord’s Supper. Bishop Ellicott writes, “The streams of the spiritual rock were to the Israelites what the spiritual food of the precious blood of Christ is to Christians. In each we recognize the mystery of a Real Presence.”<sup>133</sup> Paul makes the connection even clearer, then, in verse 16 as we have seen above.

Two things flow from what the apostle says in regard to Israel and then applies to the church (*cp.* vv. 6-12). First, that the sacred meal of the Lord’s Supper is not itself salvific; it does not guarantee the salvation of any partaker any more than the manna and water guaranteed the redemption of every Israelite in the wilderness, for “*with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.*” Paul’s allusion to the Israelites of old was a warning, not merely instruction on the meaning of the Lord’s Supper. It was a stark warning not to consider themselves immune to idolatry, not to think that all of their members were true members of the body of Christ simply because they took a special meal together. “If the Israelites had been so favoured, and yet were ‘struck down in the wilderness’ by reason of their lust, idolatry, sexual license, and complaining, the Corinthians ought to take due note.”<sup>134</sup> Ellicott adds, “All (five times repeated) enjoyed the mercies and privileges mentioned in this and the following verses; but not with all, nay, not with the greater portion of them, was God well pleased.”<sup>135</sup> Again, this note of warning is summarized in verse 12, “*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*”

This connection between Israel and the church destroys the Roman Catholic fiction of *ex opere operato*, which teaches that the mere administration of the sacrament provides the result intended and desired, regardless of the faith of either the administrator or the recipient. This magical empowerment of the bread and cup is without

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<sup>133</sup> Ellicott, Charles J. *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Andover: W. F. Draper; 1889); 186.

<sup>134</sup> Dunn; 614.

<sup>135</sup> Ellicott; 184.

foundation in Scripture and dangerous for the health of the true church. “Thus the use of the Supper in no way automatically communicates the salvation given in Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit to the members of the church.”<sup>136</sup> However, this does not mean that the meal is without power, or that abuse of it will go unpunished, as will be seen in what Paul has to say even more explicitly about the Lord’s Supper in I Corinthians 11. We conclude from I Corinthians 10, therefore, that there is an intimate connection between the bread and the cup with the body and blood of Jesus Christ, a ‘real presence’ in which the divine Host of the meal partakes along with His children. This is not a literal, physical presence or even a mystical, ubiquitous presence, but rather a spiritual presence, and no less real for that. And because it is a real presence, the improper observation of the Supper carries consequences. “Whoever does not respect the sanctity of this table fellowship, therefore, will be guilty of Christ’s body and blood, that is to say, sin against the sacrifice made by him.”<sup>137</sup>

### **I Corinthians 11 – The Institution of the Supper**

I Corinthians 11:23-26, as noted earlier, is the first mention of the Lord’s Supper in the New Testament from a literary chronological point of view. That Paul views the sacrament as very important comes out in his introductory words, “*For I received from the Lord that which I delivered to you, that in the night in which He was betrayed...*” It is not often that the apostle quotes Jesus Christ directly, nor even that he assigns a direct instruction from the Lord to what he is writing. This indicates a non-negotiable to Paul; the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper was a crucial element in the true worship of every Christian church. But, as was the case with Israel in the wilderness and Corinth in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, this true form of worship could be done falsely. Context, as always, is determinative of meaning, and Paul in Chapter 11 is continuing his polemic against the manifestation of division and schism in the Corinthian church. He has been building to this particular condemnation from at least the beginning of Chapter 10.

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<sup>136</sup> Ridderbos; 426-27

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*; 426.

*Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.* (I Corinthians 11:17-22)

This is, in a sense, the climax of the Corinthian Controversy: when they *come together*, they do not come *together* but manifest favoritism, social hierarchy, prejudice, oppression, and all manner of interpersonal vice incompatible with the Body of Christ, the church. It was apparently common in the early church to combine the observance of the Lord's Supper with what became known as an 'agape feast' – a 'love' feast. We know this was a widespread practice because we have slanderous reports from unbelievers concerning these meetings. Unfortunately, the church at Corinth seemed largely to deserve slanderous reports, from within and not merely from outside enemies, and Paul was compelled to believe them. This passage is crucial in establishing the meaning of what the apostle goes on to say in this chapter, and flows logically from what he has already said concerning the *koinonia* of the Lord's Supper in the previous chapter.

Several preliminary points may be made. The first is that, while what Paul teaches here is a universal (*i.e.*, 'catholic') truth, it is *locally applied*. There is no sense in which the Lord's Supper is observed universally; it is a local church sacrament and as such it pertains to the life of the local body. Secondly, the local church body *comes together* to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The idea of private communion or taking the communion elements to 'shut ins' is devoid of any biblical basis. In the Reformed tradition, serving the Lord's Supper to those who cannot attend the corporate service is to be accompanied by the preaching of the Word. But in reality this practice presents the believer with a false *koinonia* and turns Communion into a private matter and presents the temptation of viewing the sacrament as somehow salvific, preservative, or sanctifying

in a personal manner. The inability to attend services is a providential fact; taking communion to shut-ins is not a biblical solution.

Another point derived from this section of I Corinthians is that the fault that Paul found with the church in Corinth had nothing to do with personal sins but with interpersonal sins. This is a very important point in light of the apostle's exhortation just a few verses later, "*But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*"<sup>138</sup> Failing to understand the context in which this exhortation is couched has led many, many believers to an unwarranted introspection brought on by an impending Communion 'season' or Sunday. That there was personal sin in Corinth no one can doubt from either of the letters we have from Paul's pen. But personal sin is not what disqualifies a man from the Lord's Supper, at least not in the context of I Corinthians 11.

Finally, this small section describing the behavior of the Corinthians church as its Communion Luncheons sheds light on another exhortation later in the same pericope: "*For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, **not discerning the Lord's body.***"<sup>139</sup> There has been a great deal of ink spilled on the meaning of *discerning the Lord's body*, with much of it guided by the ancient and Reformation debate concerning the 'Real Presence' of Christ and the meaning of the Lord's institutional words, "*This is My body.*" Without saying that understanding, as best one can, the meaning of the 'body' of the Lord Jesus Christ broken on the cross is unimportant, we can however state that this is not the issue that Paul is dealing with here. The 'body' of which he speaks is almost certainly the 'body' of believers at Corinth, that the Corinthian believers were sadly misconceiving and abusing.

It is, therefore, in the midst of Paul's polemic against the factionalism, favoritism, and oppression of the Corinthian church that he sets forth the historically first recounting of the institution of the Lord's Supper by Jesus Himself.

*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He*

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<sup>138</sup> I Corinthians 11:28

<sup>139</sup> I Corinthians 11:29

## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

*broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."*

(I Corinthians 11:23-25)

Paul's wording is almost verbatim from the later Gospels, so we can conclude that the words of institution were assiduously preserved by the first disciples. In terms of the argument over the *transubstantiation* of the elements, bread and wine, into the literal body/flesh and blood of Jesus, it is important to note that Paul does not have Jesus say, *This cup is My blood*, but rather, *This cup is the new covenant in My blood*. This is a subtle but important deviation from the Matthean and Marcan accounts and in line with what we read in Luke's Gospel, *"This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."*<sup>140</sup> Although it is not Paul's purpose to define the meaning of the terms Jesus used – that was apparently commonly understood in the early church, with controversy only coming in later – it is worth our time to do a little investigative work from outside the Pauline corpus. As the Synoptic accounts of the institution of the Supper are both similar to each other and to Paul here in I Corinthians 11, we are left with a passage in John's Gospel that, while *not* John's version of the institution of the Supper, is the theological reality that undergirds the Meal.

*Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven – not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."*

(John 6:53-58)

Liberal scholars have argued that this is John's 'institution' of the Lord's Supper, though the timing and the place are all wrong. There is no indication of this in the text. What we have here is the theological truth upon which the later Supper is grounded. Superficially, it would appear that Jesus' words here fall fully into the literal camp of

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<sup>140</sup> Luke 22:20

the ‘Real Presence’ debate – whether Luther’s *consubstantiation* (a term he rejected) or Rome’s *transubstantiation* (a term Rome embraces). While it is true that a literal understanding of Jesus’ words was probably what offended the unbelieving crowd, the Lord himself corrected such an interpretation with the words later so important to Zwingli in his tête-à-tête with Luther at Marburg, “*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*”<sup>141</sup> Jesus intended His words to be understood by faith and through the Spirit, an understanding that probably did not come to the disciples until Pentecost. Some form of sacral cannibalism was never in the Lord’s mind, nor should it have ever entered the mind of man.

What is significant about this passage in light of our study of Pauline sacramental theology is the similarity between Jesus’ words in John 6 and the apostle’s analogy in I Corinthians 10. Both refer to the children of Israel in the wilderness, to Moses, and to the manna that God gave Israel each day. Tying together these two passages, and realizing that John is here giving us the foundation of the institution only recorded by the Synoptic Gospel writers, we can see that the Lord’s Supper *is not* simply a ‘Christian Passover’ meal. This has been the common understanding of the Supper primarily due to the fact that Christ instituted it at Passover, a fact that may have more to do with when He was to die than to tie the two rituals together. There are similarities, to be sure, but both John and Paul rather tie the Lord’s Supper to the sustenance God gave the Israelites under Moses in the wilderness. While it may be argued that it was water that God gave the children of Israel from the rock, and not wine, it may also be argued that the central element of the Passover meal is meat, not bread (and it is important not to confuse the Passover meal with the Feast of Unleavened Bread with which it is associated on the Jewish calendar). Schreiner writes, “Again we are reminded that Israel had spiritual food (manna) and drink (water) in the wilderness. This food and drink functioned as an anticipation and type of the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> John 6:63

<sup>142</sup> Schreiner; 380.

Jesus' allusion to Moses and the manna in the wilderness, recorded in John 6 and reworked by Paul in I Corinthians 10, reinforced the perspective that New Testament believers are the New Exodus people. The repetitive nature of the Lord's Supper, and the singular occurrence of baptism, follow the one-time passing of Israel through the Red Sea contrasted with the daily feeding on the manna and miraculous provision of water. "The Lord's Supper is indeed a matter of the bread of life, and even though we do not find in John 6 an institution of the Supper, one will nevertheless have to acknowledge the profound connection established there between Christ's self-surrender of body and blood and the blessing of his dying. It is the bread of God which gives life eternal."<sup>143</sup> Clowney adds, "Partaking of Christ by faith is eating the true manna, the bread of heaven given for the life of the world."<sup>144</sup>

The community aspect of this eating is at the core of the teaching: the Lord's Supper is a sacrament of communion, of fellowship not only with the Lord Jesus but also with one another. Clowney compares the two Christian sacraments in a way that echoes Paul's words in I Corinthians 10:1-5, "Baptism is the sacrament of initiation; the Supper is the sacrament of continuing communion in the family of God."<sup>145</sup> The Lord's Supper is the oft-repeated sacrament, not *sacrifice*, of Christ's death on the Cross and the promise of the Resurrection. As such it serves the church as a regular feast whereby the *koinonia* that every believer has with his or her Lord, and with his or her brethren, is brought to the fore for meditation and celebration. The bread and the cup are, in I Corinthians as in John, *spiritual* food and should be understood as such by partakers of the Supper; spiritual food from God. "The Supper is the continuing proclamation of the redemptive significance of Christ's death; it is spiritual food and spiritual drink for the time between the times, as manna and water from the rock after the exodus out of Egypt and before the entrance into Canaan; in its constant repetition it spans life in the present world, until he come."<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Berkouwer; *Sacraments*; 210.

<sup>144</sup> Clowney; 286.

<sup>145</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>146</sup> Ridderbos; 425.



But, again, most of the Israelites fell in the wilderness because of unbelief (*cp.* Hebrews 4:2-6). Coming back, then, to I Corinthians 11 we find Paul still in the midst of his warning to the Corinthians church to “*take heed, lest you fall.*” His summary of the matter in I Corinthians 27ff is indeed sobering, and constitutes a firm refutation of any view of the Lord’s Supper as mere ‘memorial.’

*Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.*

(I Corinthians 11:27-32)

To sensitive souls, this passage ranks second only to Hebrews 6:4-6 as the ‘doubt-your-salvation’ passage *par excellence*. Part of the problem stems from an improper translation found in the King James Version and repeated in several others. The Greek word translated as an adverbial clause, *in an unworthy manner*, in the New King James, American and New American Standard, and English Standard versions, is translated as an adverb, *unworthily*, in the King James Version. Fee writes, “Unfortunately, this adverb was translated ‘unworthily’ in the KJV. Since that particular English adverb seems more applicable to the person doing the eating than to the manner in which it is being done, this word became a dire threat for generations of English-speaking Christians.”<sup>147</sup> The word is not an adverb and does not refer to the inner condition of the participant. Indeed, if it comes down to it, all believers are ‘unworthy’ to partake of the Supper, for all have sin dwelling in their members. We are made fit to partake of the feast by grace through faith, not inner merit. But the key to the proper exegesis of the passage is not merely the correct translation of a word, but the understanding of the context. Paul,

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<sup>147</sup> Fee, *I Corinthians*; 560. Fee adds in the footnote: “This is especially true in the more pietistic sectors of Protestant tradition. People are ‘unworthy’ if they have any sin in their lives, or have committed sins during the past week. This in turn resulted in reading v. 28 personally and introspectively, so that the purpose of one’s self-examination was to become worthy of the Table, lest one come under judgment. The tragedy of such an interpretation for countless thousands, both in terms of a foreboding of the Table and guilt for perhaps having partaken unworthily, is incalculable.”

again, is not concerned here with the individual sins of the members of the Corinthian church, but their manifest *corporate* sin of disunity. “What Paul means by *unworthily* is explained by verses 21 f.; he is thinking of the moral failings of factiousness and greed which marked the Corinthian assembly.”<sup>148</sup>

Paul is not lenient on unrepentant sin, as I Corinthians 5 shows. Indeed, in that passage we find the offender being ‘excommunicated,’ “*Do not even eat with such a one.*” Though the passage does not explicitly mention the Lord’s Supper, it has consistently been viewed as a passage of removal of a professing believer who lives in unrepentant sin.

*I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even to eat with such a person.*  
(I Corinthians 5:9-11)

Yet even excommunication ties in with Paul’s emphasis on the unity and harmony of the local body of Christ as the pure atmosphere of the Lord’s Supper. This is not intended as a ‘just get along’ admonition from a paternal apostle to his recalcitrant children. Rather it is the continuation of Paul’s understanding of the church as the body of Christ, baptized by one Spirit into one body, whose Head is the one Lord, Jesus Christ. The Lord’s Supper is supremely the sacrament of unity of the body. “This is not a matter of a human and self-evident communion, based on our own flesh and blood, but it finds its basis in the act of Christ’s mercy which precedes all celebration of the Lord’s Supper and all communion of believers.”<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Barrett; 272.

<sup>149</sup> Berkouwer; 280.

**Lesson 7 – Sacraments in Practice (Baptism)**

**Text: Leviticus 10:1-3**

*“In the early Church there are only these two celebrations or services –  
the common-meal,  
within the framework of which proclamation of the Word had always a place,  
and Baptism.”  
(Oscar Cullmann)*

In Leviticus 10 we read the sobering – and to many, disturbing – passage of the sin of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron the High Priest. The text tells us that the two priest offered ‘strange fire’ before the LORD, and Jehovah’s response was to erupt from the altar in fire and consume both men. There is no detail given as to the nature of this ‘strange fire,’ though it may have been that Nadab and Abihu placed their own blend of incense into their firepans, and not that which was specified as exclusive to the offering. Whatever the minute details, the two priests offered what the Apostle Paul would later call ‘will-worship,’ as usual coining his own word to describe something.<sup>150</sup> The meaning is plain, though the word is unique: it is worship offered to God derived from the worshipers own will and desire, and not from God’s prescribed manner of worship. Nadab and Abihu ‘did their own thing,’ and it was rejected in no uncertain terms. The LORD subsequently commanded through Moses that Aaron was not even allowed to mourn his dead sons for, *“By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored.”*<sup>151</sup>

The lesson gleaned from this event is that God may not be worshiped in any manner suited to the will and imagination of men, but must be worshiped according to His written standards. Theologically this has come to be known as the **Regulative Principle**, usually stated thus: “That which is not prescribed in Scripture regarding the worship of God, is thereby forbidden.” The opposite view allows any form or manner of worship so long as it is not explicitly forbidden in Scripture. Reformed churches tend to follow the Regulative Principle; others, like the Lutheran communion, do not. But the

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<sup>150</sup> Colossians 2:23

<sup>151</sup> Leviticus 10:3

Regulative Principle assumes that the manner and method of divine worship is clearly expressed in Scripture so as to be followed. The Levitical statutes concerning the incense to be offered before the LORD was explicit as to its formulation and also its prohibition for any other use (implying, we may add, the prohibition of any other incense to be used in the worship of Jehovah).<sup>152</sup>

*And the LORD said to Moses: "Take sweet spices, stacte and onycha and galbanum, and pure frankincense with these sweet spices; there shall be equal amounts of each. You shall make of these an incense, a compound according to the art of the perfumer, salted, pure, and holy. And you shall beat some of it very fine, and put some of it before the Testimony in the tabernacle of meeting where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. But as for the incense which you shall make, you shall not make any for yourselves, according to its composition. It shall be to you holy for the LORD. Whoever makes any like it, to smell it, he shall be cut off from his people."*

(Exodus 30:34-38)

The Regulative Principle does approach the worship of God with the foundational realization that *He is holy*, and that the worshiper is not. Fallen man, even redeemed, cannot imagine worship acceptable to God; he cannot simply bring 'strange fire' before the Lord and expect it to be accepted. But it must be admitted that the Regulative Principle only applies in the broadest sense because there are a number of elements of worship that are not, or at least not clearly, spelled out in the Bible. Even the incense of the altar was to be 'salted,' with no mention of how much salt was to be added. In terms of our current study on the sacraments of the New Testament church – Baptism and the Lord's Supper – we are faced with two dominical ordinances, the method of each being almost entirely absent from the biblical text. As with the preaching, the singing, and the praying of the assembled congregation, the manner and timing of these two dominical ordinances is left unspecified. Thus there is disagreement – and has always been disagreement – on the basic questions concerning the practical observance of both sacraments: *Who* are the proper worshipers for each? *When* are they to be observed? *How* are they to be administered?

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<sup>152</sup> Exodus 30:9

This lack of specificity in the New Testament text regarding the mode and method of Baptism and the Lord's Supper is borne out in the practice of the early church, inasmuch as we have written evidence of the early church. The first fact to note is the *diversity* of practice among the churches, especially between the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity. However, alongside that diversity is a great deal of *commonality*, which at least allows us to provisionally determine what was *essential* to the practice



Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921)

of the two sacraments, and what was *incidental*. But the practice of the church after the apostles cannot be viewed as infallible, and we are always forced back to the Scriptures to try to determine more accurately the who, the when, and the how of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Benjamin Warfield, in his excellent article, *The Archæology of the Mode of Baptism*, reminds us that "it is necessary to exercise great caution in assuming what we

find to be the practice of this century [*i.e.*, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century] to be also apostolic, merely because it represents the earliest usage which we can trace."<sup>153</sup> Still, early practice at least gives a greater connection to original practice than later developments. As Warfield's article on the mode of baptism shows, early practice is often the best we have to work with, and by comparison of the different modes of administration to the biblical description and definition of the sacraments, we may hope to at least avoid gross error.

This lesson is a bit of an Excursus, as we will not be focusing primarily on the Pauline data with regard to the administration of the sacraments, but will find ourselves in other portions of the New Testament as well as largely outside of the New Testament, in the writings of the early church. The 'who, when, and how' of Baptism and the Lord's Supper were not clearly stipulated by the apostles, but that did not hinder church leaders as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century from setting forth principles of practice for both sacraments. Indeed, Warfield establishes our position in the investigation of the mode of baptism, "Our archæological inquiry as to the mode of Christian baptism

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<sup>153</sup> Warfield, Benjamin B. *Studies in Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust; 1988); 377.

leaves us hanging, then, in the middle of the second century.”<sup>154</sup> We may conclude *a priori* that these principles need not be determinative or normative for the Church throughout her life ‘between the times,’ but they are perhaps the closest reflection we in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century have to what might have been the practice in the churches when the apostles still lived and taught.

### **Baptism – Who?**

Warfield, a committed paedobaptist, had this to say about the proper recipients of the sacrament, “According as is our doctrine of the Church, so will be our doctrine of the Subjects of Baptism.”<sup>155</sup> While paedobaptists and credobaptists disagree as to the proper subjects of Baptism, we can agree as to the importance of the matter: it truly hinges on the definition one has of the Church itself. This is because there is absolutely no disagreement on the role of the sacrament of Baptism as *initiatory* into the Church: Baptism introduces the recipient *into* the Church, the body of Christ, and into all of the blessings and benefits involved. Adolf Schlatter writes of baptism, “It brought reconciliation with God by establishing fellowship with the Messiah...That is why baptism also contained the promise of the Holy Spirit. What the Messiah gives, what he does, what he had done and what he will do, becomes the possession of the baptized. To join the Church by baptism is to share all the blessings Jesus gave to his original disciples.”<sup>156</sup>



Adolf Schlatter (1852-1938)

We saw in the last lesson that in all cases where Baptism is mentioned in Paul’s letters, it is intimately connected with faith. This is also true of the earliest preaching of the apostles as recorded in the Book of Acts, although the corollary to faith is often brought forward: *repentance*. Philip’s response to the Ethiopian official when the latter

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*; 385..

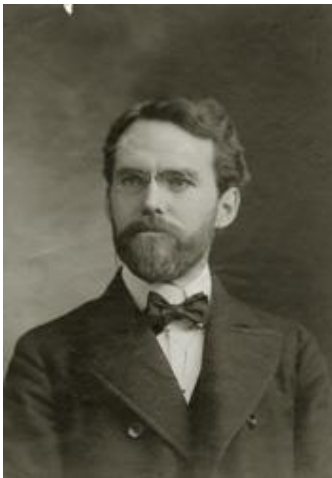
<sup>155</sup> Warfield; 389.

<sup>156</sup> Schlatter, Adolf *The Church in the New Testament Period* (London: SPCK; 1955); 27.

requested baptism is indicative of the position of *faith* relative to the proper recipient of the sacrament,

*Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.* (Acts 8: 35-38)

It must be noted that the exchange between Philip and the eunuch concerning the latter's belief is not found in all manuscripts and may have been added later. The dialogue is found in the Western, Latin texts but is largely missing from the Eastern, Greek texts. Be that as it may, any addition would have been made very early in the history of the church and, therefore, likely represented an accepted connection between



Arthur McGiffert (1861-1933)

baptism and a profession of faith. Indeed, it may have been added in response to and critique of the rising practice of baptizing infants. If it is a later amendment, it is one that was accepted, as it is found in a great majority of later texts. This is to say that the practice of baptizing believers was *normative*; that of baptizing infants was *innovative*. Arthur McGiffert writes, "Whether infants were baptized in the apostolic age, we have no means of determining. Where the original idea of baptism as a baptism of repentance, or where Paul's profound concep-

tion of it as a symbol of the death and resurrection of the believer with Christ prevailed, the practice would not be likely to arise."<sup>157</sup>

Paedobaptists recognize this truth – at least *Reformed* paedobaptists do – and therefore do not defend their doctrine from the position of the nature and significance of baptism itself, but rather from their own covenantal, and therefore *familial*, configuration of the Church. Warfield's article entitled *The Polemics of Infant Baptism* is very in-

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<sup>157</sup> McGiffert, Arthur Cushman *A History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons; 1914); 543.

structive on this score, as it accurately represents the Presbyterian position on the covenantal significance and importance of infant baptism. The essence of the paedobaptist position, according to Warfield, lies in the nature of the Church and not in the meaning and significance of the sacrament itself. Paedobaptists of the Presbyterian stamp view the Church as the covenantal community of Abraham's spiritual heir, and therefore consider the covenantal sign of circumcision to be abiding in the New Testament Church as infant baptism. *Continuity* of the covenant is the key factor, not the meaning of baptism. Warfield therefore writes of "the unavoidable implication of the continuity of the Church of God, as it is taught in the Scriptures, from its beginning to its consummation."<sup>158</sup>

In this system, the proper recipients of baptism are not determined by the nature and import of the sacrament, but rather are *a priori* determined by the perceived nature of the Church as the continuation – without change – of the Abrahamic Covenant. The subtlety of this argument is that the Church *is* the continuation of the Abrahamic Covenant, in its fulfillment in the Messiah, the Seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ. However, it remains a matter of serious debate whether this covenantal community has continued *without change*. Warfield again shows how the paedobaptist arrives at his conclusion regarding the proper recipients of the sacrament not through the biblical statements regarding the rite itself, but rather through an extension of the Abrahamic community, without change, into the New Testament Church: "the subjects of baptism are the members of the visible Church: and who those are, will certainly be determined by our theory of the nature of the Church."<sup>159</sup>

This is a very significant and enlightening statement, in that it shows how the doctrine of infant baptism is not derived from the Scriptures – either with regard to historical practice or with regard to the biblical definition and significance of baptism – but rather from an ecclesiological perspective that continues the Abrahamic dispensation without change into the New Testament Church. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to say

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<sup>158</sup> Warfield; 390.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*; 394-95.



that paedobaptism is a *theological construct* rather than a biblical ordinance. In spite of the arguments in favor of the alleged ‘family baptisms,’ Warfield admits the biblical data to be lacking, “It is true that there is no express command to baptize infants in the New Testament, no express record of the baptism of infants, and no passages so stringently implying it that we must infer from them that infants were baptized. If such warrant as this were necessary to justify the usage we should have to leave it incompletely justified. But the lack of this express warrant is something far short of forbidding the rite.”<sup>160</sup> Indeed, so convinced is the Presbyterian paedobaptist that the paradigm of circumcision under the original Abrahamic Covenant is, without modification, determinative, that Warfield insists on an explicit notice of abrogation in the New Testament in order to prove infant baptism illegitimate. “The argument in a nutshell is simply this: God established His Church in the days of Abraham and put children into it. They must remain there until He puts them out.”<sup>161</sup>

Infant baptism is a practice that arose fairly early in the history of the Church, perhaps by the middle of the second century. However, the justification given to the practice had nothing to do with the Abrahamic Covenant, and everything to do with cleansing from sin and baptismal regeneration. The covenant theory of infant baptism had to await the advent of John Calvin, *et. al*, in the Reformation. Paedobaptism was known to such early church theologians as the North African Tertullian, who opposed the practice in his usual, vehement way. Taking off from the common paedobaptist biblical refrain – “*Suffer the little children to come to Me and forbid them not,*” – Tertullian writes, “The Lord does indeed say, ‘Forbid them not to come unto me.’ Let them ‘come,’ then, while they are growing up; let them ‘come’ while they are learning, while they are learning whither to come; let them become Christians when they have become able to know Christ.”<sup>162</sup> Thus we see that the practice of baptizing infants, which rec-

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<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*; 399.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*; 408. It generally escapes the paedobaptists attention that God also put the servants and slaves of Abraham into the same covenant, by virtue of extending the requirement of circumcision to them as well as to the children. Cp. Genesis 17:10-14.

<sup>162</sup> Tertullian, *On Baptism*.



Karl Barth (1886-1968)

eives no explicit warrant in the New Testament, was neither universally accepted among the leading Christian scholars of the early Church, nor was done with the same purpose and justification given. It may be justifiably said that infant baptism has long been a practice in search of a theology. Indeed, Karl Barth stated the matter most vehemently, “From the standpoint of a doctrine of baptism, infant baptism can hardly

be preserved without exegetical and practical artifices and sophisms – the proof to the contrary has yet to be supplied!”<sup>163</sup>

The point of this survey is simply to show that even the paedobaptist must admit that the nature and meaning of baptism, as a sacrament, does not lead to the admission of infants and, in fact, decisively argues against it. Infant baptism must be admitted on different ground – ecclesiological and covenantal ground – and not on the basis of baptism itself. The credobaptist considers this an illegitimate theology – one that essentially ignores the fundamental meaning of baptism in order to propagate a theory of the Church. It is argued by the paedobaptist, however, that the credobaptist cannot be sure of the validity of the faith of any professing believer, and therefore can and does administer baptism to unbelievers. This is a biblical premise, as illustrated by Simon Magus in Acts 8.:9-23. Simon was a great magician whose magical arts astounded the people to the point that he was called, ‘*the great power of God.*’ Upon hearing the gospel preached by Philip, Simon believed and was baptized. But it becomes quickly apparent in the narrative that the magician’s heart had not be regenerated; his baptism was false.

*But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they re-*

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<sup>163</sup> Quoted by Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*; 308.

## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

*ceived the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."* (Acts 8:12-23)

The paedobaptist uses this narrative to argue that the credobaptist cannot know whether a professing believer is a true believer, and therefore must of necessity administer the sacrament to unbelievers no less than the paedobaptist who baptizes infants who never become believers. The argument is fallacious, because Philip's actions show the early linkage between faith and baptism: Simon Magus was baptized on the basis of his profession of faith, not on Philip's knowledge of the magician's heart. This does not prove infant baptism valid, but rather shows that God has given profession as the only indication of a valid candidate for baptism. The reality of that profession is the domain of the One who alone knows the heart of man.

### **Baptism - *When?***

The 'cleansing' aspect of baptism was a consistent attribute in the writings of the early Church 'Fathers.' Paul himself seems to allude to the initiatory sacrament in terms of cleansing and washing (see previous lesson). But this perception of the effect of baptism actually led to two diametrically-opposed views on *when* a person should be baptized. As noted above, infant baptism was justified on the grounds of the water washing away original sin, leaving the child in an Adam-like state, ready for the sanctifying grace of God through the Church. This is the view still maintained by the Roman Catholic Church, and seems to be influential in the paedobaptist forms and formulas of the Lutheran and Anglican communions. All of these churches have formularies that allude to baptismal regeneration in the act of infant baptism. For instance, the Anglican Prayer Book specifies the following prayer for the service of infant baptism:

ALMIGHTY and immortal God, the aid of all that need, the helper of all that flee to thee for succour, the life of them that believe, and the resurrection of the dead: We call upon thee for this Infant, that he, coming to thy holy Baptism, **may receive remission of his sins by spiritual regeneration**. Receive him, O Lord, as thou hast promised by thy well-beloved Son, saying, Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: So give now unto us that ask; let us that seek find; open the gate unto us that knock; that this Infant may enjoy the everlasting benediction of **thy heavenly washing**, and may come to the eternal kingdom which thou hast promised by Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>164</sup>

In the case of infants, baptism was said to remove Original Sin. But in the case of adults, it was claimed that the waters of baptism washed away all sins previously committed. This teaching led to an opposite perspective in terms of *when* baptism was to be admitted, with a small but significant minority of believers waiting as long as possible to undergo the rite. One such *procrastinante* was the Emperor Constantine, perhaps knowing the weakness of his flesh and concluding that, if he had too much time between his baptism and his death, he might commit more sins than had been washed away in baptism. This view was not a common one and was never officially sanctioned by any Church leaders, councils, or synods. Still, the practice illustrates what errors can arise when one misinterprets, or disproportionately interprets, one aspect of the sacrament to the neglect of the others. It also shows how a sacrament can come to have almost magical powers in the minds of those who submit to it as well as those who teach and administer it.

But if we reject these two extremes and focus only on those recipients who are of the age and mental capacity to *repent and be baptized*, when should the sacrament take place? If we follow strictly the biblical record, we would have to conclude that baptism follows immediately upon the confession of faith, as we find in the Book of Acts.

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<sup>164</sup> [Public Baptism of Infants | The Church of England](#). Accessed 20September2022.

## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

*And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.* (Acts 2:40-41)

*But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.* (Acts 16:25-34)

Even Simon Magus, who later turned out to be a false believer, was baptized upon profession of faith.

*But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.* (Acts 8:9-13)

Paul's own experience was the same: as soon as he heard the gospel from Ananias, he believed and was baptized. However, it did not take long in the history of the expanding church before a period of instruction in Christian doctrine was interposed between the profession of faith and the reception of baptism. This introduction of a *catechism* prior to baptism may have derived from the Jewish practice of training prior to a child's *bar* or *bat mitzvah*, or it may have been a reaction to such false baptisms as that of Simon. However it came to be, it did, and by the middle of the second century there had arisen a class of church 'members' called *catechumens*, who were receiving instruction from the clergy in preparation for their baptism and official introduction into the

church. The famous church polity manual, *The Teaching of the Twelve*, which dates from shortly before AD 150, has this to say about the timing of baptism:

Now about baptism: this is how to baptize. Give public instruction on all these points, and then 'baptize' in running water, 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' If you do not have running water, baptize in some other. If you cannot in cold, then in warm. If you have neither, then pour water on the head three times.<sup>165</sup>

We will have occasion to return to this reference in discussing the *how* of baptism, as it also indicates the flexibility of the sacrament depending on the availability of water. The point here is the necessity of instruction, of preparing the candidate for baptism in order that he or she will be able to answer a set of questions posed just prior to the baptism itself. Whatever we may say about this practice, it certainly highlighted the chasm between the practical elements of baptizing adults (or children of the age of accountability) on the one hand, and of infants on the other. Infants were baptized merely on the recognizance of two or three 'godparents,' whose 'faith' stood in for the baby's. This practice was based primarily on the Old Testament legal principle, "*On the testimony of two or three witnesses let every matter be established,*" indicating again the general belief that infant baptism was salvific. For those of age to actually profess faith, however, immediate baptism was quickly replaced with a period of 'teaching to the test,' so to speak, of catechism classes designed to provide the candidate with the proper responses to the questions asked in order to establish the validity of the candidate's faith. On the one hand, the 'faith' of two or three adults stood surety for the non-faith of the infant; on the other, the faith of the professing believer had to be tested against the catechism before baptism was administered. This practice largely prevails today in most Catholic and Protestant churches.

There does not appear to be any biblical warrant for the introduction of a catechismal period between one's profession of faith in Jesus Christ and one's reception of baptism, the initiatory rite into the Body of Christ, the Church. Schlatter writes in summary of the earliest practice of the church, "But how were men to become members of

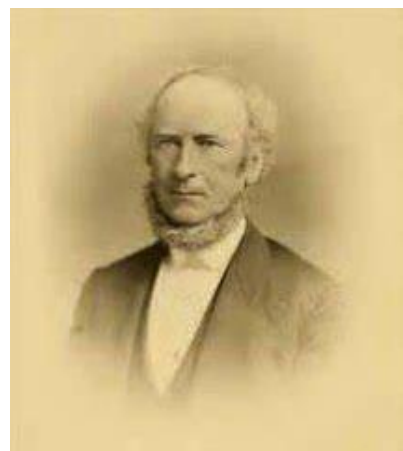
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<sup>165</sup> Richardson, Cyril C. *ed. Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Simon & Schuster; 1996); 174.

the Church and partakers of her privileges? From the beginning the answer was unhesitatingly by baptism. The apostolic preaching culminated in the offer of baptism; the primitive sermon was a baptismal sermon. Its purpose was not merely the acceptance of an idea: it demanded a definite act."<sup>166</sup> While there at all times remains the possibility of baptizing those who remain unbelievers, as was Simon Magus, this does not give the church warrant for delaying baptism until such time as the recipient is able to answer stock questions concerning their faith. The knowledge of the heart remains the sole domain of God, and it is left to the church to accept the profession of faith so long as there is no valid reason to doubt it.<sup>167</sup>

### **Baptism - How?**

For many this question is the crux of the matter. And for many the answer to the *how* of baptism is contained in the Greek word, *baptize*. James W. Dale, a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Presbyterian minister and theologian, spent a great part of his life parsing this Greek word in any ancient form he could find. These works were published in several volumes, all titles *Baptizo* and each dealing with the word in a certain genre of the literary sources; Patristic, Jewish, Johannean, etc. All students of baptism have encountered Dale's works, and for many his conclusions are decisive. Dale's conclusions, however, have not gone unchallenged even in his own day, and more so since. His works betray his Presbyterian bias, and his conclusion that the Greek word *baptizo* has no inherent meaning of 'to dip' or 'to immerse,' is largely rejected by all other Greek scholarship. Even paedobaptists admit, as Warfield does, that the term primarily means 'to immerse'



James W. Dale (1812-81)

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<sup>166</sup> Schlatter; 26.

<sup>167</sup> It was not uncommon during the expansion of Christianity into the Roman and post-Roman world, for entire tribes to 'accept' Christ on the basis of the tribal leader having done so. Such mass baptisms as followed this practice were, to be sure, immediate; they were, however, no less invalid for their immediacy. This scenario is not one that the modern, Western church is likely to encounter.

or ‘to dip.’ But as with most words, it can be used with a widely varied meaning and need not always connote its most basic one.

It is a sad testimony to the cause of credobaptism that the ongoing argument with paedobaptist so often hinges on this Greek word as the end-all in terms of the mode of baptism, as if the conclusion of immersion as the only valid means of baptism would immediately rule out the baptism of infants. It would come as a surprise to many Baptists that infants were baptized in the early and medieval church, *by immersion*. Granted, it was quick and was not done on sickly infants. Nevertheless, it was done on the basis of the general acceptance that this is what the word means. But it is equally evident, as shown in the quote above from *The Teaching of the Twelve*, that immersion was not the only form considered valid in the early Church.

In terms of the exegetical importance of individual words, it must be remembered that the usage of the word within its context is the governing principle in terms of meaning. Words are fluid in any language, as illustrated by the fact that all languages have puns – plays on words. As for the New Testament usage of the Greek word *baptizo*, we find several places where the term, or its cognates, is used with reference not to Christian baptism, but to the traditional Jewish ritual washings.

*Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the **doctrine of baptisms**, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.* (Hebrews 6:1-3)

*Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people’s sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience – concerned only with foods and drinks, various **washings**, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.* (Hebrews 9:6-10)

While it is true that this sampling comes from only one author, it is sufficient to establish that the Greek term under consideration need not refer at all times to Christian



baptism and, by implication from the context in which it is used by the author of Hebrews, it need not always signify complete immersion. It is probably used in these passages on account of (1) its usage in the Septuagint with regard to ritual washings and (2) that many of these washing – though not all – were immersions of the person or vessel thus cleansed. In other words, the biblical evidence supports the interpretation of *baptizo* as primarily signifying ‘immersion,’ but also recognizes that it need not always mean that.

Perhaps more significant is the historical fact that the meaning of the term itself was not determinative of the practice of the early Church. Benjamin Warfield concludes as much in his monumental essay on the topic, “The Archæology of the Mode of Baptism” published in *Bibliotheca Sacra* in 1896. Warfield does conclude that the most ancient form of baptism in the extant writings is *immersion*, but interestingly notes that the most common form of baptism portrayed in ancient art is *pouring* or *affusion*. He notes that development of the mode of baptism between the Western (Latin) and Eastern (Greek) branches of the Church not only pertained to the mode but also the formula – with both immersion and affusion, single immersion/affusion and triple (trine) immersion/affusion, and even baptism in the Triune Name of God as well as baptism only in the Name of Jesus. Tracing the history of the sacrament impressively through the writings of Church theologians both ancient and medieval, Warfield comes to the High Middle Ages and the influential theologian Aquinas, “Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century still represents immersion as the most common and commendable way of baptizing, because of its more vivid representation of the burial of Christ.”<sup>168</sup>

Even later, during the era of the Reformation, Warfield is able to quote Erasmus as reporting, “With us infants are poured upon; with the English, they are immersed.”<sup>169</sup> Yet, even with the admission that immersion was the more proper method – not because it was the sole meaning of the Greek word, but rather because it most approximated the *meaning* and image of baptism – Warfield finds that “There was never a

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<sup>168</sup> Warfield; 350. It should be noted that by this time infant baptism was an established and unalterable fact of the ‘universal’ Church of Rome, of which Aquinas was the chief theologian.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*; 350-51.

time when the Church insisted upon immersion as the only valid mode of baptism.”<sup>170</sup> We again consider the mid-Second Century document, *The Teaching of the Twelve*, as quoted above:

Now about baptism: this is how to baptize. Give public instruction on all these points, and then ‘baptize’ in running water, ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’ If you do not have running water, baptize in some other. If you cannot in cold, then in warm. If you have neither, then pour water on the head three times.

The preference very early in the history of the Church is for ‘trine’ immersion in running water, sometimes referred to as ‘live’ or ‘living’ water. If this is unavailable, then pouring water from a vase is the next best thing, the implication being that *moving* water was to be preferred to *still* water. This emphasis on moving water may have derived from the traditional Jewish ritual cleansing baths, known as *mikvaōt*. The



Mikvaōt in Jerusalem

archaeological evidence both in literature and in actual discovered baths, indicates that water flowed down through progressively lower baths so that each *mikvaōt* was constantly supplied with running or ‘living’ water. The rabbinic ‘laws’ concerning the *mikvaōt*, refer constantly to immersion, though even this is not required as total. In addition, it was not a requirement that the water be ‘living’ except for certain types of cleansings. Still, it appears that the traditional application of the rabbinic washing was full immersion in a bath with cascading, living water. The flexibility even in the rabbinic practice appears to have come over to an equal flexibility within the administration of Christian baptism.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Century North African bishop Cyprian, undeniably a key figure in the Church of that time, provides further evidence that the mode of baptism was not the governing principle in terms of its validity in the early Church. Warfield quotes Cyprian with regard to baptism of various forms, as saying, “all such baptisms are perfect,

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<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*; 351.

provided faith is not wanting in ministrant and recipient – the mode of the application of the water not being of essential importance. He argues that, as the contagion of sin is not washed away like the filth of the body by the water itself, there is no need of a lake for cleansing: it is the abundance not of the water but of faith that gives efficacy to the sacrament.”<sup>171</sup> Thus while immersion was the preferred mode of application, affusion was universally accepted as equally valid, and was indeed prescribed in cases of the paucity of water or the fragile health of the recipient. “We meet with no evidence from the writings of the Father that baptism by affusion was held anything other than irregular and extraordinary; but we meet with no evidence that it was accounted void.”<sup>172</sup> McGiffert adds, “It may safely be inferred from this that while from the beginning baptism was commonly by immersion, the essential feature of the rite was the use of water and not the mode of its use.”<sup>173</sup>

Warfield does note the interesting dichotomy present in the ancient sources between the *written* evidence and the *artistic* evidence found in the catacombs, on ancient Christian monuments, and frescoes. In the former, immersion is universally the preferred mode, with affusion or pouring being the exception by reason



Baptism of Clovis I (c. AD 496)

of necessity. However, in archaeological discoveries through the first Christian millennium, there is a universal consistency in the portrayal of baptism *by pouring or affusion*. “It is most noteworthy that from the second to the ninth century there is found scarcely one pictorial representation of baptism by immersion; but the suggestion is almost uniformly either of

sprinkling or pouring.”<sup>174</sup> Warfield spends a great deal of his essay both describing and attempting to explain this discrepancy between the written and the artistic testimony of the ancient through the early medieval Church. That the evidence maintains the differ-

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<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*; 353.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*; 360.

<sup>173</sup> McGiffert; 542.

<sup>174</sup> Warfield; 361.

ence between literary versus pictorial representations of baptism is undeniable, concludes Warfield. “When Jerome and Leo and Pelagius and Gregory were speaking of trine immersion as of order in Rome, the artists were still laying stress on affusion.”<sup>175</sup>

But the discrepancy might not be as stark as it appears. Many of the artistic portrayals of Christian baptism do indeed show the water of baptism being applied by pouring. But in most of these representations, the recipient was also standing in a pool of water. From the simple (and perhaps simplistic) perspective of the artist, it would be hard to portray baptism by immersion as the recipient would be under the water! Considering the evident lack of ready *mikvaōts* here and there throughout the Roman Empire, one can envision the reasonable facsimile of a pool of water with water poured over the professing believer out of a pitcher, as is frequently depicted in the ancient art. Warfield concludes, “We may, then, probably, assume that normal patristic baptism was by a trine immersion upon a standing catechumen, and that this immersion was completed either by lowering the candidate’s head beneath the water, or (possibly more commonly) by raising the water over his head and pouring it upon it.”<sup>176</sup>

The evidence from the early church, while not infallibly indicative of the practice of the apostolic era, nonetheless illustrates a remarkable flexibility within essentials – the most essential element being water, and lots of it, if available. McGiffert summarizes the historical data nicely, “It may safely be inferred from this that while from the beginning baptism was commonly by immersion, the essential feature of the rite was the use of water and not the mode of use.”<sup>177</sup> Combining the fundamental aspects of baptism – of cleansing and of burial with Christ – one can readily see how immersion becomes the preferred method, with pouring allowed by necessity and, later, by convenience. There is one mode of baptism almost entirely absent from the ancient records: sprinkling.

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<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*; 369.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*; 372.

<sup>177</sup> McGiffert; 542.

**Lesson 8 – Sacraments in Practice (Lord’s Supper)**

**Text: Leviticus 10:1-3**

*“Such as it was, this sacrament was very frequently observed,  
and formed the central point of all Christian worship.  
It was the table at which the children of God delighted daily to feed.”*  
(Islay Burns)

Except for infant baptism, the sacrament of Baptism remains today essentially what it was 2,000 years ago. Not all communions agree as to what the rite means, but it is almost universally agreed that it represents *initiation* into the Church, the Body of Christ, and therefore it is again almost universally administered to people who confess faith in Jesus Christ as adults. The instrument of baptism is still water, and though the mode has varied, baptism by copious amounts of water is still the norm. In reading the ancient and medieval comments on Baptism, one might reasonably conclude that the practice of sprinkling could only have arisen in the desert. Be that as it may, the general agreement concerning the meaning and practice of Baptism stands in stark contrast to the vast diversity of views as to the meaning and practice of the Lord’s Supper, also known historically as the Eucharist. In the Roman Catholic Church, the Mass is celebrated by priests, either privately or corporately, every hour of every day, somewhere in the world. At the other extreme, the Highland Scottish Free Church offers the Lord’s Supper only once a year, during an elaborate ‘Communion Season’ that lasts five days. Some denominations, such as the Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ, believe Communion to be essential to maintaining one’s salvation, while other sects like the Salvation Army and the Quakers (Society of Friends) do not observe the sacrament at all. Both the Roman Catholic view and these last two mentioned are outside the scope of our evangelical study, though the Romish view will bear discussing due to the Reformation reaction against it.

One of the key elements of the debate is whether the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is a *sacrifice*. Rome clearly believes that it is, calling it a ‘bloodless sacrifice of Christ’ as a reenactment of His bloody sacrifice on Golgotha. Benjamin Warfield also maintains that the Lord’s Supper is a sacrifice, cogently reasoning from Paul’s analysis

in I Corinthians 10 that the apostle considered the Christian sacrament as analogous both to the Jewish sacrifice on the altar of the tabernacle on the one hand, and the pagan sacrifice on the other. He writes, “Clearly to Paul and the Corinthians, the Lord’s Supper was just a sacrificial feast. As such – as the Christian’s sacrificial feast – it is put in comparison with the sacrificial feasts of the Jews and the heathens. The whole pith of the argument is that it is a sacrificial feast.”<sup>178</sup>

But if Warfield’s analysis is correct, what makes a Protestant observation of the Lord’s Supper to differ from the Roman Catholic? In what way is Christ sacrificed in the Lord’s Supper in a Protestant setting versus the corresponding sacrifice of the Catholic Mass? It should be noted that the apostle himself does not refer to the bread and the wine being ‘sacrificed’ in the I Corinthians 10 passage; his emphasis is on the ‘koinonia’ that the worshiper has with the ‘host’ of the meal, be it the Jewish sacrifice, the pagan offering, or the Christian Communion. The use of the term ‘sacrifice’ is historically problematic, as this aspect of the Eucharist was a major stumbling block for the Reformers against the Roman Catholics in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Even Warfield – whom no one would ever accuse of being friendly toward Rome – is somewhat unguarded in his use of the term.

The primary lesson of our text to-day [*i.e.*, I Cor. 10:16,17] is, then, that in partaking of the Lord’s Supper we claim a share in the sacrifice which Christ wrought out on Calvary for the sins of men. This is the fundamental meaning of the Lord’s Supper as a sacrificial feast. The bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper represent the body and blood not absolutely but as a sacrifice – as broken and poured out for us...We are to recognize from the beginning that they were broken and outpoured in sacrifice for us, and that we share in them only that, by the law of sacrificial feast, we may partake of the benefits obtained by the sacrifice.<sup>179</sup>

It is this ‘sacrifice-that-is-not-really-a-sacrifice-but-a-remembrance-of-a-sacrifice’ that Protestants have stumbled over for five hundred years, with Roman Catholics always standing by to assist the fall.

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<sup>178</sup> Warfield, Benjamin B. *Faith & Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust; 1990); 226-27.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*; 229.

A second issue that has confused and confounded both the meaning and the practical observance of the Lord's Supper is that of the Passover. Is the Lord's Supper the replacement 'feast' for the Jewish Passover? Most evangelicals would say 'yes,' and the Highland Scottish Free Church's once-yearly observance of Communion fairly screams, 'Christian Passover.' Warfield writes, "The Lord's Supper is the continuation of the Passover feast. The symbol only being changed, it is the Passover feast. And the eating of the bread and drinking of the wine mean precisely what partaking of the lamb did then."<sup>180</sup> But while it is undeniable that there is a very close connection between the Jewish Passover and the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ – *Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us* – we must not overlook the fact that both Paul in I Corinthians 10 and John in the sixth chapter of his gospel, allude rather to the provision of manna and water in the wilderness than to the Passover seder. This should be enough to challenge any clear-cut, one-for-one exchange between the Jewish Passover and Christian Communion.

There is perhaps no aspect of the history of the Church that has been so impacted by tradition than the observation of the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist, or Communion, or the Lord's Table. Answering the Who?, When?, and How? of this sacrament in any thorough manner would take an equally thorough analysis of the various historical traditions in the various branches of the professing church, a task far too great for this study. As with Baptism, these three questions are not clearly answered by Scripture itself. But, as with Baptism, there are sufficient indicators in the New Testament text – and especially in the letters of Paul – to help guide the way.

### **The Lord's Supper – Who?**

Those considered proper recipients of the Lord's Supper did not seem a mystery in the early church, at least not in the apostolic and immediate post-apostolic era. There was in those days a close connection between those who were baptized and those who partook of the Lord's Supper. In Acts we read of the many who were baptized in one

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<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*; 228.

day, and subsequently gathered every day to ‘break bread,’ a phrase commonly interpreted to include, at least, observance of the Lord’s Supper.

*And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.* (Acts 2:40-42)

The close association between baptism and the Lord’s Supper is also seen in I Corinthians 10, where Paul speaks of Israel also being ‘baptized’ and then moves to the classic description of the spiritual meaning of the Supper, in verses 16-17. In his more explicit treatment of the Supper, Paul speaks of the participants *proclaiming* the Lord’s death until He comes. Grosheide writes, “He that comes to the Lord’s table declares that he not only believes that Christ died to pay for the sins of His people, but that he also believes that Christ lives that Christ lives and that His death has significance for all times.”<sup>181</sup> This is the proclamation of a believer, and we have seen that the initiatory sacrament of Baptism was to be applied to all upon confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

This understanding of baptism preceding the Lord’s Supper extended into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century without dissent. Justin Martyr, the 2<sup>nd</sup>-Century Christian apologist, writes in his First Apology,

This food we call Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake except one who believes that the things we teach are true, and has received the washing for forgiveness of sins and for rebirth, and who lives as Christ handed down to us.<sup>182</sup>

At around the same time, the *Teaching of the Twelve* records even more bluntly, “You must not let anyone eat or drink of your Eucharist except those baptized in the Lord’s name. For in reference to this the Lord said, ‘Do not give what is sacred to dogs.’”<sup>183</sup> And we ought not think that this unanimity of practice was due to the ritual being unimportant; rather it was the case that the Eucharist – meaning *Thanksgiving* –

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<sup>181</sup> Grosheide; 273.

<sup>182</sup> Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*; 286.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*; 175.



had quickly become the heart and soul of the Christian worship service. Schlatter writes, “The Eucharist riveted the Church to contemplation of the Cross of Christ. The Greeks had little to prepare them for a formulated doctrine of the Cross, for the end of Jesus conflicted with their sentiments and ethical traditions. Yet the Cross of Christ remained the event through which Christian piety constantly apprehended its relation to God. As early as the second century the Sunday celebration of the Lord’s Supper was the central act of worship.”<sup>184</sup> Unfortunately, this centrality of the Lord’s Supper usurped the place of the *teaching of the apostles* that was so important in the first days of the Church, and the Supper itself came to have an increasingly salvific, even magical, influence on ecclesiological thought and practice.

This development, however, had little impact on the *Who?* of the Lord’s Supper, as even the advent of infant baptism did not alter the requirement that the proper recipient of the Eucharist be a professing believer. Thus the sacrament of Confirmation was added in between Baptism and the Eucharist, wherein the prospective communicant is ‘admitted to the table,’ through examination of his or her faith in Jesus Christ. Modern paedobaptists refuse to acknowledge the reality of Confirmation in their polity, though they still require both examination and confession of those who, baptized as infants, later seek admission to the Table. The almost-universal attitude of the Church throughout the ages and among all its varied denominations, has been that the only proper recipient of the bread and the wine is he or she who has been visibly admitted into the Church by virtue of the profession of faith in Jesus Christ. The exception – that of *paedo-communion* – proves the rule.

The importance of limiting those who partook of the Supper to professing believers is reflected in ancient and modern church architecture. The terminology used is that of ‘**fencing the table,**’ and all Roman Catholic and many Protestant church structures have physical barriers between the congregation at large and the elements of the table (called the altar among those denominations that view the Supper as a sacrifice). Reformed churches tend to ‘fence’ the table verbally, with the minister proclaiming that

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<sup>184</sup> Schlatter, *New Testament Period*; 319.

only those who have met the criteria of confession established by that denominations polity are permitted to partake of the bread and the cup. In some denominations com-



George W. Knight III (1931-2021)

municants actually go into a separate room of the church in order to partake, leaving those who do not meet the requirements to remain in the main chapel or meeting hall until the Communion Service is completed. George Knight, exegeting Paul's admonition for the would-be communicant to '*examine himself, and so let him eat,*' writes, These words of warning (and invitation) are given to us by

our leaders for use at the Lord's Supper. We will do well to practice these fencings and heed these warnings."<sup>185</sup> Knight's comments are in the context of a debate against paedocommunion with the Reformed Presbyterian church. This phenomenon, represented by a very small minority within the Presbyterian denominations, is worth investigating briefly for the light it sheds on the practice of, and the problems inherent to, infant baptism.

#### **Excursus: Paedocommunion**

The practice of paedocommunion is that which allows children – in some cases as young as infants – to partake of the Lord's Supper by virtue of their having been baptized as infants. Knight comments, "Paedocommunion is the view that baptized covenant children should partake of the Lord's Supper without needing to make a profession of faith before the church or without indicating to the elders that they can meet the requirements set forth by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29."<sup>186</sup> Knight opposes the practice, and though he does reason from the Scripture in reference to the verse cited, his primary argument within the Presbyterian communion is that paedocommunion violates the Westminster standards. Knight's line of reasoning shows the danger of reli-

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<sup>185</sup> Beisner, E. Calvin ed. *The Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros & Cons* (Ft. Lauderdale: Knox Theological Seminary; 2004)291.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*; 295.

ance upon confessions and standards rather than upon the Word of God, and illustrates a tendency noted by the Dutch Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof, in his *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*. Berkhof writes of a period of ‘Confessionalism’ immediately following the Reformation, “But while they refused to submit their exegesis to the domination of tradition and of the doctrine of the Church as formulated by councils and popes, *they were in danger of leading it into bondage to the Confessional Standards of the Church.*”<sup>187</sup> This danger has never left the Protestant churches, and it most powerfully manifested in our day in Reformed churches. So



Louis Berkhof (1873-1957)

we find George Knight, a very capable and sincere biblical exegete, relying primarily upon the Standards of the Presbyterian Church in his argument against the practice of paedocommunion within the Presbyterian community.

Although Presbyterians among them (*i.e.*, the paedocommunionists) can claim that the *Westminster Confession of Faith* 38.1 states that baptism is the means ‘for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church,’ at the same time they must take an exception to the uniform teaching of these confessional standards and related constitutional documents which say that ‘Noncommunicant members are the baptized children of communicant members’ (cf., eg., *Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 13.2, p. 21; cf. also *Book of Discipline*, II.B.f, p. 101) and that the Lord’s Supper is to be administered ‘only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves,’ *Larger Catechism* 177.<sup>188</sup>

Knight goes on to make a fine distinction not only between the visible and the invisible Church, but also the inclusive and the exclusive covenant, terminology nowhere found in Scripture. The fundamental problem the Presbyterian has, however, is that the teaching of infant baptism in that communion clearly emphasizes the full benefits of the New Covenant as accruing to the baptized infant. The paedocommunionist simply follows this logical progression of the benefits of the New Covenant to include

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<sup>187</sup> Berkhof, Louis *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1994); 28. Italics original.

<sup>188</sup> Beisner; 295.

the Lord's Supper. Of course, from a credobaptist perspective, the fact that the infant or immature recipient of the Lord's Supper cannot 'examine himself' is really no different than the fact that he or she cannot profess faith at baptism. The problem lies at the root of paedobaptism itself; paedocommunion is simply the logical offshoot of the original weed.

Peter Leithart, an advocate of paedocommunion, answers Knight in the same volume, and points out that those who advocate covenant baptism of infants but oppose paedocommunion have, in fact, introduced a false dichotomy within the church. Leithart poses a series of four questions to the 'antipaedocommunionist,' the most telling of which is the third: "Does baptism admit the bap-



Peter J. Leithart (b. 1959)

tized into the covenant or symbolize his prior inclusion in the covenant (paedocommunion), or does baptism merely express a hope that the baptized one day will enter the covenant by some other means (antipaedocommunion)?"<sup>189</sup> This is a minor debate within the Presbyterian communion, and it is unlikely that any more than a small minority of paedobaptists will ever adopt paedocommunion, but it remains remarkable that the debate fails to cause any of its combatants to question the fundamental issue of paedobaptism itself. With a reliance on tradition and on the Standards of the Presbyterian Church – predominantly the *Westminster Confession of Faith* – the participants in the debate stand unmoved on their bedrock of infant or covenant baptism. The antipaedocommunionist is on the weaker ground, for if the blessings of the covenant truly accrue to the baptized, then how can the infant be denied communion? In attempting to refute the paedocommunionist, Presbyterians like George Knight cannot rely on Scripture but must revert to the 'standards' of their denomination: "Furthermore, some paedocommunionists seem to take the grace promised in baptism as operative at the moment of baptism, whereas the confessional standards clearly say that the grace is 'not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered' but that it is 'conferred, by the Holy Ghost,

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<sup>189</sup> Beisner; 298.

to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time. (*WCF*, 28.6)<sup>190</sup> Both sides of this minority debate within the paedobaptist camp are using a great deal of duct tape.

### **The Lord's Supper – *When?***

As opposed to the biblical clarity of the *Who?* of the Lord's Supper, the *When?* has a varied witness in the New Testament. While we read of the earliest disciples *breaking bread* from house to house every day, we read the Apostle Paul speaking only of '*when you come together*' and implying that this was on the first day of the week (*cp.* I Corinthians 16:2). The dominical ordinance itself merely states, '*as often as you eat*' and '*as often as you drink*' the bread and the cup.<sup>191</sup> This lack of specificity, along with widely variant perspectives on what the sacrament represents, have led to an equally wide disparity as to how often certain communions within professing Christianity observe the Lord's Supper. As noted in the introduction to this lesson, the Roman Catholic Church observes the Mass somewhere on the planet every hour of every day, whereas the Highlands Scottish Free Church only observes it once a year. Both of these extremes derive from the basic conception in each church as to the meaning of the Lord's Supper. There is a common bond, however, in that both view the Supper as a sacrifice: Rome considers the Eucharist to be the 'bloodless' sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ in the consecrated bread and wine, whereas the Free Church considers the Lord's Supper to be the New Covenant replacement for the Jewish Passover feast, with Jesus the Passover Lamb remembered in this 'sacrifice.'<sup>192</sup>

Considering the most frequent version, that of the Mass of the Roman Catholic Church, first, we find that the sacrificial meaning of the Eucharist is said to have ongoing redemptive power through the consecration of the elements. Thus we read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the eucharist

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<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*; 296.

<sup>191</sup> I Cor. 11:25

<sup>192</sup> It should be noted that not all Free Church congregations observe the Lord's Supper only once per year. Stornoway Free Church has four communion services per year, while others have two. The most common iteration, however, is once per year.

are *one single sacrifice*: ‘The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of offering is different.’ ‘In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner.’<sup>193</sup> The reason the Mass is celebrated hourly in the Roman Catholic Church is so that the continuation of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice might be assured for both the living and the dead who have not yet been fully purified from their sins (*i.e.*, are in Purgatory). Hence Section 1364 of the *Catechism* states, “As often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which ‘Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed’ is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out.”<sup>194</sup> And, “The Eucharistic sacrifice is also offered for the *faithful departed* who ‘have died in Christ but are not yet wholly purified,’ so that they may be able to enter into the light and peace of Christ.”<sup>195</sup>

With respect to the individual Catholic, observance of the Eucharist is only required once per year. “But the Church strongly encourages the faithful to receive the holy Eucharist on Sundays and feast days, or more often still, even daily.”<sup>196</sup> Though the Roman Catholic Church denies that the daily offering of the Mass detracts from the “*once for all*” sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, this denial is betrayed by the frequency of the Eucharist and its interpretation as the ongoing redemptive work of Christ through the Roman Catholic priesthood. The language is typically vague, first saying one thing and then saying the opposite, “The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ’s Passover, the making present and the sacramental offering of his unique sacrifice, in the liturgy of the Church which is his Body.”<sup>197</sup> But the overall thrust of the Roman Catholic teaching is that the Eucharist *is a sacrifice* necessary for the continuing process of salvation for the ‘faithful.’ The *Catechism* makes this point very clear: “The Eucharist is ‘the source and summit of the Christian life.’ The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesial ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are

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<sup>193</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday;1995) *Imprimi Potest*; Sec. 1367. Italics in original.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*; Sec. 1364.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*; Sec. 1371. Italics in original.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*; Sec. 1389.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*; Sec. 1362.

oriented toward it...In brief, the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith: 'Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking.'"<sup>198</sup>

If the Roman Catholic perspective on the *When?* of the Lord's Supper is the most magical and accords to the sacrament the most intrinsic saving power, the perspective of the Highland Scottish Free Church is perhaps the most sober and non-mystical. Generally observed once a year during 'Communion Season,' the Lord's Supper in the Scottish Free Church most closely mimics the Jewish feast of Passover. The better part of a full week is devoted to sermons and prayer, bracketing Communion Sunday. David Murray, one-time pastor of Stornoway Free Church (Continuing) and current Senior Pastor of the Free Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, MI, offers a concise summary of the events from Thursday through Monday of 'Communion Season' in the Scottish Free Church.<sup>199</sup> In the introduction to this short essay, Murray writes, "One of the major results of the Scottish Reformation was an intense carefulness in the administration of the Lord's Supper."<sup>200</sup> Murray then offers a summary of each day, with a single word characterizing the spiritual intent and goal of each day.

**Thursday - Humiliation** "This time of quiet and rest from regular work gives people time to search their lives and souls with a view to confession of sin. There are two church services on Thursday - morning and evening - which focus on Psalms and Scriptures related to conviction of sin, contrition and repentance."

**Friday - Examination** "In a way, Thursday involves self-examination as well. However, on the Thursday we look for sin to confess, whereas on Friday we look for marks of grace to encourage us. We might say that the Christians are 'killed' on a Thursday, and then raised again on the Friday."

**Saturday - Preparation** "Saturday prepares Christians for the Lord's Supper by turning their attention outwards, usually to the person of Christ."

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<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*; Sec. 1324 and Sec. 1327.

<sup>199</sup> Murray, David, "The Scottish Communion Season" [The Scottish Communion Season - The Presbytery of the United States | The Free Church of Scotland \(Continuing\) \(westminsterconfession.org\)](https://www.westminsterconfession.org/). Accessed 26 September 2022.

<sup>200</sup> *Idem.* and throughout.

Saturday is also the day the Session meets to interview prospective communicants for the Sunday observance of the Table. Believers who qualify are given a communion token – “giving them warrant to sit at the Lord’s Table the next day.” Somewhat remarkably, those who profess faith in Jesus Christ for the first time are also interviewed and, if their confession is accepted, granted a token – it being assumed, one supposes, that the new convert had been baptized as an infant. No mention is made of adult baptism prior to the Lord’s Supper. Also remarkable is the apparent situation that it is only on this *Preparation Saturday* that new converts are interviewed and received. “This is always a time of great expectation and anxious anticipation, as the minister and elders wait to see if their labours of the past months have borne any visible fruit. Sometimes no one comes, and we have to submit to the Lord and patiently labour on. At other times – O! such blessed times – two, three, or even more might come trembling, one after another, to the Session room, to profess faith and seek admission to the Lord’s table.”

**Sabbath – Commemoration** Sunday brings the long-awaited moment: the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. The service is divided into three segments: the *sermon*, the *fencing of the table*, and the *Lord’s Supper* itself. The *fencing* portion is quite firm, “The minister will speak briefly, from a discriminating text in order to encourage the poor in spirit to take their places at the Lord’s Table and to dissuade the ungodly from sitting at the table and bringing judgment on themselves.” For those deemed unworthy to partake, this is a form of ‘excommunication’ upon the ‘ungodly.’

**Monday – Thanksgiving** “On Monday, there is sometimes a service in the morning, but certainly one in the evening, when God’s people gather to give thanks to God for all His mercies over the Communion Season.”

**Tuesday – Revival** “The Communion Season officially ends on the Monday evening. However, the effects continue on to the Tuesday. And the effect is usually that of reviving the spirits of God’s people.”

The practice of the Scottish Free Church is unique among Christian denominations in observing the Lord’s Supper so rarely. The intention, as noted by Murray, is to solemnize the sacrament by isolating it on the calendar in much the same manner as were the three national feasts of Israel. This infrequent observation of the Lord’s Sup-



per, however, represents the farthest remove from the example of both the apostolic and post-apostolic eras. In all cases recorded, the observation of the Lord's Supper was



Oscar Cullmann (1902-99)

no less than every time the congregation met. Oscar Cullman notes, "We have found a convincing argument for the view that as a rule there was no gathering of the community without the breaking of bread...The Lord's Supper is thus the basis and goal of every gathering."<sup>201</sup> This frequency and centrality of the Supper stems from the realization – from the teachings of the apostles – that the Lord Jesus is Himself present as the Host of the meal. It was therefore unthinkable that a gathering of

Christ's people would be held without the meal at which Christ sat as the divine Host. "This meal is uniquely 'his own,' eaten by the gathered people of God in his presence (by the Spirit) and in his honor."<sup>202</sup> Frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper was also encouraged by the analogy to the manna in the wilderness, found in both John 6 and I Corinthians 10. Ridderbos thus notes, "The Supper is the continuing proclamation of the redemptive significance of Christ's death; it is spiritual food and spiritual drink for the time between times, as manna and water from the rock after the exodus out of Egypt and before the entrance into Canaan; in its constant repetition it spans life in the present world, until he come."<sup>203</sup>

But we have already noted that the New Testament data is ambiguous, with believers meeting '*from house to house every day*' and '*on the first day of the week.*' In addition, it is assumed that the phrase '*breaking bread*' included the celebration of the Lord's Supper; this is not explicit in Luke's account. Also noted in a previous lesson is the sage counsel of Warfield that the ecclesiastical practices of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century cannot be given apostolic authority; things can change very quickly. And while it is evident that the Lord's Supper was observed quite regularly, it is also noteworthy that this observation soon evolved (or *devolved*) into the Mass, an ongoing, non-bloody sacrifice of the Lord

<sup>201</sup> Cullman, Oscar *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM Press LTD; 1966); 29.

<sup>202</sup> Fee, *I Corinthians*; 540.

<sup>203</sup> Ridderbos, *Paul*; 425.

Jesus Christ. One scholar notes that, while concern is expressed regarding too often observing the Lord's Supper (*i.e.*, weekly), that same concern is not expressed with regard to a weekly sermon. Richard Barcellos writes, "Others, out of concern not to trivialize the sacred...are content with a monthly or less-frequent celebration. But prayer is sacred, and the reading and preaching of the word are sacred, and no one (as far as I know) argues from that to less frequent public prayer and less frequent public reading and preaching of the word of God."<sup>204</sup> But the sad truth is that the preaching and teaching of the Word has never been in danger of being viewed by the members of the congregation as mystically connected with their individual salvation. Ritual is meaningful; it is also dangerous. While there is no biblical reason *not* to observe the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis, there is historical caution.

This investigation did not answer the question, *When?* It is, perhaps, unanswerable from the biblical and historical data extant. The biblical data is settled, and any additional historical data would be no more authoritative and infallible than what is currently known. There can be no denying that the sacrament took on mystical and magical powers as it evolved in the early church into the Catholic Mass. But this does not necessarily justify the once-yearly observance of the Highland Scottish Presbyterians. No one can argue that a weekly observance is in any violation of biblical patterns, though caution needs to be expressed with respect to the historical evolution of so-frequent a celebration of the sacrament. Perhaps monthly is no more than a compromise in the midst of conflicting data. What is certain, however, is that a balance must be maintained that both accords the Lord's Supper the dignity and influence that it possesses as the *Lord's Supper*, while at the same time avoids elevating the ritual into a continuing occurrence of the Lord's once-for-all sacrifice on Golgotha.

### **The Lord's Supper: *How?***

There is remarkably little written on *how* the Lord's Supper should be administered and observed. There is, of course, the extreme position of Rome regarding observ-

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<sup>204</sup> Barcellos; 111.

ing the Mass ‘under one specie,’ in other words, denying the cup to the communicants and only giving them the bread. To justify this practice, Rome teaches that the whole body of Christ is present under each of the elements, so that providing only one element to the communicant does not divide Christ. Again from the *Catechism* we read, “Since Christ is sacramentally present under each of the species, communion under the species of bread make it possible to receive all the fruit of Eucharistic grace. For pastoral reasons this manner of receiving communion has been legitimately established as the most common form in the Latin rite.”<sup>205</sup> Remarkably, the section goes on to state that the Eastern rite, in which both the bread and the wine are offered to the communicant, is the form in which “the sign of the Eucharistic meal appears more clearly.”<sup>206</sup> Still, the fear that the wine might spill and be desecrated by being ingested by an insect or a rat continues to govern the ‘pastoral’ reasoning of the Roman practice.

No other denomination discriminates between offering the bread and offering the wine. Of course, many modern churches, from the time of the Temperance Movement in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, refuse to offer alcoholic wine but substitute grape juice instead. This has been taken by some to a level of sublime absurdity through the claim that the wine drunk by Jesus and His disciples was alcohol-free. The several warnings in Scripture concerning the danger of getting drunk on wine would seem to argue that the wine they did drink did indeed contain alcohol. In fact, this was part of the problem at Corinth, a phenomenon that might be used to justify the use of grape juice in lieu of wine.

*Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and **another is drunk**. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.*  
(I Corinthians 11:20-22)

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<sup>205</sup> *Catechism*; Sec. 1390.

<sup>206</sup> *Idem*.

Another modern practice that has no biblical warrant is the taking of the communion elements to ‘shut ins.’ Ernest Kevan speaks to this practice in his treatise, *The Lord’s Supper*, and tries to justify the practice while at the same time maintaining the clear, *public* and *corporate* nature of the sacrament. His treatment is worth reading in full as it displays the mental gymnastics required to countenance a practice that is contrary to the biblical ordinance itself.

Perhaps one short observation is not out of place here. It has to do with the taking of the Communion Service to the bedside of a person in hospital or in his home, or what is sometimes called private communion. In the early days, our Protestant forefathers strongly resisted this, and the reason was obvious. The Roman church and, in some measure, other churches, had completely abused the Lord’s Supper and had turned it into an administration in which the one who dispensed it assumed the function of a priest. He came to the sick man in his bed and, as it were, ‘did’ something to him. Now that is a complete denial, an absolute cutting at the roots, of the significance of the Lord’s Supper. There is nothing unscriptural, however, about the observance of the Lord’s Supper around the bed of a sick man provided the biblical pattern of the Lord’s Supper be preserved at such an observance. This means that the minister is to bring around the bed a company of the church in miniature. It should never be just the sick person and the minister, for then an utterly false relation comes almost unconsciously to be created. Let the elders of the church be present; let there be two or three believers together with the minister. If all these cannot assemble, then let there be at least just one more, together with the minister and the sufferer. This provides what we read of in Matthew 18 verse 20: ‘For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them’ I hope I am not being unkind here, but I cannot help feeling that the requests that we ministers occasionally receive from people in hospital are sometimes inspired by a superstitious idea about the Lord’s Supper that they have learned from their neighbors. I do nevertheless appreciate that some bed-ridden saint of God who has been cut off from the joys of the house of God for many a long month would greatly rejoice to be able to remember the Lord’s death with his fellow-believers in a gathering of them in his room or in the hospital ward. What I desire to say is that I think we must be cautious about our use of the Lord’s Supper in our ministry to the sick, we must be watchful lest we countenance some erroneous conception of it.<sup>207</sup>

The danger of ‘private communion’ really cannot be avoided by such well-meaning reasoning. If the person is temporarily sick, then the providence of an all-

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<sup>207</sup> Kevan, *The Lord’s Supper*; 53-54.

knowing and all-good God dictates that his or her observance of the Supper must wait til health returns. If the sickness is severe or even terminal, then a bedside administration of the Lord's Supper is too much like the Catholic sacrament of last rites to be admissible. Nadab and Abihu may have been well meaning; they were no less wrong for that.

These are, however, examples of how *not* to observe the Lord's Supper. What can we say positively to the *How?* of the sacrament? Should the communicants partake of a common loaf and common cup? Should the wine be watered down and must the bread be unleavened? Should everyone sit around a large table, have the elements passed to them, or file past tables set with the bread and the wine set up along the aisles? Should the minister elevate the elements in consecration, or simply participate along with the congregants and in no special manner? Should Scripture be read during the sacrament, or music played? Is there a specific liturgy, such as the reading of I Corinthians 11 or one of the Synoptic Gospel accounts of the Last Supper, during the administration of the bread and the cup? Are we allowed to honor digestive intolerances among our assembly by offering gluten-free bread? Each of these options and more represent actual practices within professing Christian denominations throughout history and at the present time. Unfortunately there are no clear biblical mandates that cut through the fog to tell us exactly how to observe the Lord's Supper.

One cannot look solely to the Passover meal, as the primary element of that meal was the lamb, which is not a part of the Lord's Supper. So also the daily provision in the wilderness consisted of bread (manna) and *water*, not wine. Practices in the Church over the ages have been frequently patterned after the Passover meal or the manna in the wilderness, but this has at all times been by inference and not by explicit biblical statement. This does not mean that such practices are necessarily wrong, just that they cannot be held up over other, similar practices as being superior, for none have express biblical warrant. Again we are forced into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century to read the earliest practical *How?* of the Lord's Supper, from the *Teaching of the Twelve*:

Now about the Eucharist: This is how to give thanks: First in connection with the cup: 'We thank you, our Father, for the holy vine of David, your child, which you have revealed through Jesus, your child. To you be glory forever.' Then in connection with the piece [broken off the loaf]: 'We thank you, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you have revealed through Jesus, your child. To you be glory forever. As this piece [of bread] was scattered over the hills and then was brought together and made one, so let your Church be brought together from the ends of the earth into your Kingdom. For yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever.'<sup>208</sup>

Justin Martyr describes the communion celebration as a time immediately followed by the giving of offerings by the congregants. He also shows that the practice of taking the elements to 'shut ins' began as early as the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> Century.

And on the day called Sunday there is a meeting in one place of those who live in cities or the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. When the reader has finished, the president in a discourse urges and invites [us] to the imitation of these noble things. Then we all stand up together and offer prayers. And, as said before, when we have finished the prayer, bread is brought, and wine and water, and the president similarly sends up prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his ability, and the congregation assents, saying the Amen; the distribution, and reception of the consecrated [elements] by each one, takes place and they are sent to the absent by the deacons. Those who prosper, and who so wish, contribute, each one as much as he chooses to. What is collected is deposited with the president, and he takes care of orphans and widows, and those who are in want on account of sickness or any other cause.<sup>209</sup>

These two descriptions of the practical observance and administration of the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist, are from roughly the same time period – middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century. They are similar in essentials but differ in particulars. That is the undeniable history of the sacrament over the past two thousand years. Uniformity in practice has never been realized, nor should it be sought. Instead there should be a constant exhortation as to the *meaning* and *significance* of the Supper: the unity of the body of Christ in table-fellowship with the Lord Himself, at *His* meal. Everything must be ordered in the observance of the Lord's Supper to emphasize the sacrament's two fundamental princi-

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<sup>208</sup> *The Teaching of the Twelve*; 9.1-4. In Richardson, *Early Church Fathers*.

<sup>209</sup> *First Apology* 1.67. *Early Church Fathers*.

ples: the all-sufficient death of Jesus Christ on behalf of His own, and the unity of the church, the body of the risen Lord. There may be a great deal of leeway in specifics, but there is no room for either of these central principles to be diminished. The first, an awareness of the meaning of the sacrament, is something that every believer must meditate upon individually as they are reminded of the institution of the Lord's Supper by whoever administers. The second, however, is a corporate act of oneness that at least the Corinthian church had great trouble achieving. No doubt their bad example has been followed in the Church far too often. "*Judging the body*" has far more to do with understanding the unity of the church than it does to personal confession and soul-searching; it is truly of the essence of a properly administered Lord's Supper. Dic Eccles, onetime (what time is unknown now) minister of the Hebden Bridge Baptist Church in Yorkshire, writes this in his little treatise, *The Implications of the Lord's Supper*.

The Lord's Supper is an expression of the sameness of each person who partakes. All are present on the same basis: that they are sinners saved by grace through faith in Christ. It matters not whether they be Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female, university professor or dustbin man, Duke or commoner, black or white – they are equal in coming to the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a leveler of men.

The Lord's Supper, then, is an expression of what ought to pertain in the fellowship of the church as a whole. No one, because of what he is in daily life, should have any eminence in the church of Christ (James 2:1-4). Each person, in taking the Supper, is saying that he accepts this equality and that he pledges himself to observe it in every aspect of the church's life.<sup>210</sup>

That seems as good a statement as to the *How?* of the Lord's Statement as any we are likely to find. To the degree that any congregation attains this standard, to that degree it is correctly observing the Lord's Supper: to His glory and to the edification of the saints.

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<sup>210</sup> Eccles, Dic *The Implications of the Lord's Supper* (Fullerton, CA: Reformed Baptist Publications; nd); 7.

**Lesson 9 – From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day**

**Text: Colossians 2:9-17**

*“There are three antitypes: the antitype of death is sleep,  
the antitype of prophecy is dream,  
the antitype of the age to come is the sabbath.”  
(Genesis Rabbah 17.5)*

When God created the heavens and the earth, He established the great light of the Sun to rule the day and the lesser lights of the Moon and the stars to rule the night. Thus it was on Day 4 of Creation Week that *time* was established as part of the created order,

*Then God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth”; and it was so. Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the fourth day. (Genesis 1:14-19)*

The legacy of this creative day is seen in the universal recognition among the ancients of the time markers associated with geophysical and celestial motion: the *day* for the rotation of the earth upon its axis, the *month* for the movement of the moon around the earth as denoted by its phases, and the *year* for the transit of the earth around the sun. The numbers are not exact, of course, and every ancient culture (as well our modern one) discovered the need to add a day or a month here and there to square things with the celestial map. But even the constellations were quickly used to mark the seasons as well as to guide mariners and travelers on their journeys. With a little adjustment here and there, the lights of the heavens indeed worked like clockwork.

But then there is the *week*. There is no geophysical or celestial justification for it – nothing about the earth, moon, sun, or stars occurs in regular seven-day intervals. Nor was it universally recognized as a denotation of time. Certainly the Romans did not use the week; their calendar was entirely based on the day, month, and year and transac-



tions on any given day were determined by the auspices for that day as noted by the augurs (*i.e.*, “Caesar, beware the Ides of March!”). The atheistic republicans of the French Revolution tried in vain to remove the *week* from French chronology, recognizing as they did that as a denotation of time it has no basis except for the one given it in Genesis.

The origin of the *week* is irrevocably tied with the institution of the *Sabbath*, the seventh-day rest of God from his ‘labor’ of Creation.

*Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.* (Genesis 2:1-3)

The uniqueness of the *week* as initiated in the beginning by the Creator Himself, demands consideration in light of the fact that it is the only regular time marker that has



Eliezer Schweid (1929-2022)

no concrete foundation in the movement of the earth, moon, or stars. Eliezer Schweid, in his book *The Jewish Experience of Time*, points out that common human experience has *cosmic* and *biological*, and *historical* time markers – the biological being such things as birthdays, anniversaries, and death days. Schweid writes, “There are three structural principles of the calendar and annual cycles as units of time: the cosmic principle sets the measured units of night and day, month, year, and season; the biological principle determines the course for individuals as they develop and change, and marks communal times in the tempo of the generations; and the historical principle marks events that symbolize the goals and aspirations of the people, events that express the value judgments that determine a way of life.”<sup>211</sup> Schweid points out that even the Scriptures align with these cycles of life; for instance, Qohelet writes,

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<sup>211</sup> Schweid, Eliezer *The Jewish Experience of Time: Philosophical Dimensions of the Jewish Holy Days* (Jerusalem: Jason Aronson, Inc.; 2000);5.

## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

*One generation passes away, and another generation comes;  
But the earth abides forever.  
The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it arose.  
The wind goes toward the south, and turns around to the north;  
The wind whirls about continually, and comes again on its circuit.  
All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full;  
To the place from which the rivers come, there they return again.  
All things are full of labor; man cannot express it.  
The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.  
That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done,  
And there is nothing new under the sun.  
Is there anything of which it may be said, "See, this is new"? (Ecclesiastes 1:4-10)*

But where is the week in all of this? The week sets a chronological cadence different from the created order; indeed, it is *imposed* upon the created order by the Creator Himself. The six days of Creation are set in two sets of three days each, with the second set corresponding directly with the associated Day in the first set. Thus we see that Light was created on Day One, but it is not until Day Four that the lights are differentiated and Time is instituted. On the second Day God separated the waters above from the waters below, but it was not until Day Five that He caused the waters below to be inhabited by the ocean creatures and the waters above (the sky) to be filled with birds. Thus the parallelism provides the poetic framework for the narrative of Creation, but only for six days.

To these days of divine labor is added a seventh, a Day of divine rest – a *Sabbath*, from the Hebrew for ‘seven.’ Thus we have the seven-day week – with no geophysical or celestial correspondence, only an act of divine fiat, “*The God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it...*” Schweid comments, “Here another distinction must be made. The Sabbath is sanctified; in this it is as distinct from the other days as light is different from darkness. It symbolizes the intended perfection of Creation...It is not a cosmic event that is responsible for the singularity of the Sabbath. Although the seventh day encompasses the same measure of time from evening to day as the other days do, it is sanctified and set apart by God through rest. Rest is the completion – or the perfection – of

doing. It is the pulse beat of purposefulness. It ratifies the direction of time's flow to a future and to wholeness."<sup>212</sup>

The Sabbath cannot be ignored by Christians as being a mere Jewish day, a Jewish observation no longer binding upon Christians. This is because the establishment of the Sabbath predates God's covenant with Abraham; it predates the Jewish nation and the Mosaic Law. As such it forms a component part of God's *initial* purpose for His Creation and is thus termed by many theologians as a *Creation ordinance* – something ordained by God before Man fell into sin and therefore something given without reference to sin or atonement. But recognition of this fact does not lead inevitably to the conclusion that the Sabbath must be observed by Christians. Nor does it provide either the logical or the theological justification for an alleged shift in the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week. Many Christians refer to Sunday as the 'Christian Sabbath,' a view that will be challenged in this lesson. For the Sabbath has an intrinsic meaning that cannot be divested from it, though the meaning of the Sabbath can be (and has been) fulfilled. Paul's views on the Sabbath are remarkable, and were of that typical nature that consistently got the apostle into trouble with his fellow Jews. That alone is sufficient to advise caution in dealing with the Sabbath and the believing Church's relation to it. Suffice it to say at this preliminary stage that God introduced into His Creation a Seven-Day rhythm, a rhythm that was encoded into the national life of His people Israel, and a rhythm that continued and continues in the Church.

It should be noted here that there is little evidence from the Scriptures that the Sabbath – even as codified in the Ten Commandments – constituted a day of *worship*. This would seem counterintuitive to many Reformed minds who have long considered the 'Christian Sabbath' as particularly set apart for the worship of God in Jesus Christ. However, what is paramount in the biblical record is that the Sabbath Day, even for God, was predominantly a day of *rest*. Schweid comments, "Nonetheless, the a priori abstention from work is not merely meant to free time for an alternative endeavor; rather, it is the primary and main content of the day. The Sabbath is a day of non-work,

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<sup>212</sup> Schweid; 13-14.

and that is the meaning of *Shabbat*: He rested from the labor of Creation; man rests with him.”<sup>213</sup> The coincidence of worship and the Sabbath day is more prevalent in the synagogue period and especially after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. Prior to that the weekly Sabbath was instituted as a day of rest in commemoration of the divine rest on the seventh day of Creation week. In the passage of institution – the Ten Commandments – there is nothing recorded regarding specific assembly, sacrifices, or worship associated with the Sabbath.

*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.* (Exodus 20:8-11)

In reference to the proper *attitude* of the Israelite toward the Sabbath, other than obedience, there was to be a sense of great delight in this day of rest.

*If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, Nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken.* (Isaiah 58:13-14)

This is not to say that observance of the Sabbath was not itself an act of worship, an act of faith; it definitely was. Remembering the Creation is remembering the Creator; and doing so by abstaining from labor for an entire day is itself a reminder that it is God “*who gives the power to make wealth.*”<sup>214</sup> But it is important to the current discussion to realize that the purpose of the Sabbath was not to free up a day for everyone to go to the Temple and make their offerings and praises to Yahweh. Indeed, the specific *worship* of

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<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*; 37.

<sup>214</sup> Deuteronomy 8:18

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Israel as a collective people of God was stipulated for the three annual feasts, these were the times that Israel was to gather wherever the tabernacle – later the Temple – was set up and offer their sacrifices and praise to Yahweh. It is interesting that in Leviticus 23, where the three annual and national feasts are most succinctly described, the section is headed by notice of the weekly Sabbath,

*And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings.'"*

(Leviticus 23:1-3)

The Sabbath is the cadence of life for the Israelite, a seven-day rhythm of work and rest, with the rest being essentially the refrain repeated after every six days of labor. The holy convocations, the *worship* of an assembled Israel before Yahweh their God, occurred at the three annual feast immediately after described. Indeed, with reference to the Feast of Firstfruits, the Levitical statute commands that the wave offering be presented *on the day after the Sabbath*, or the first day of the week.

*And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; **on the day after the Sabbath** the priest shall wave it. And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the LORD.*

(Leviticus 23:9-12)

This observation is significant in that, after the destruction of the Temple and the end of Levitical sacrifice, the Sabbath did indeed become a day of assembly in the synagogue with a 'service' and 'liturgy' from which the early church may very well have borrowed. But that was not the original purpose of the Sabbath, either at Creation or at Sinai. There are even a couple of passages that would indicate that the customary day of sacrifice was not the seventh but the first day of the week. The first example is quite early: the offerings of Cain and his brother Abel, recorded in Genesis 4,

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*And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.* (Genesis 4:3-5)

The emphasis of pretty much every exegesis of this passage is the sad sequel: the murder of Abel by his brother Cain. Further interpretive effort is made in attempting to determine why Abel's offering was acceptable to God while Cain's was not. But the phrase "in the process of time" rarely gets much press. It is literally, "at the end of days" and seems to indicate a regular interval of sacrifice that was instituted as early as the first human family. The length of this period is indeterminate from the passage, though many have interpreted it to mean the end of six days, so that Cain and Abel were bringing their offerings on the Sabbath. The phrase itself, however, would be more likely to refer to the *week* as a whole – or perhaps a month or a year – rather than part of a week, as in six days. The famous medieval Spanish rabbi, Aben Ezra, considered the phrase to refer to the passing of a whole year, but his commentary is as subjective as anyone else's. But there is another Old Testament passage that might shed light on the ancient customs of those who lived before God but who were not comprised within the Mosaic Covenant. We read in the opening verses of Job that this righteous man had seven sons who each took a day to host a party for his siblings – seven parties in seven days (with apparently no rest on the seventh, a possible reason for what follows):

*So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did regularly.* (Job 1:5)

Job would sacrifice early on the morning of the day *after* the seven-day Bacchanalia or, in other words, *on the first day of the week*. Now this is by no means sufficient to



Aben Ezra (1089-1164)

establish the worship patterns of the antediluvians, or even the patriarchs of the pre-Mosaic era. It merely is offered as an example of a righteous man presenting his offerings to God on the first day of the week rather than the seventh, a pattern (and the text clearly states that it was something Job did regularly) that may shed light on the “*end of days*” in Genesis 4. Be that as it may, these passages are sufficient to illustrate the principle that the Sabbath was not instituted as a day of sacrifice, but rather as a day of rest.

One further note regarding the Creation Ordinance of the Sabbath, as it is frequently called among Reformed theologians and preachers. There is no denying that God observed the Sabbath on the seventh day, and that He sanctified it. But nowhere



Gerhard von Rad (1901-71)

does the text state that God thereby required man to observe the Sabbath. It is an inference, though it may be a very strong one, and not an explicit ‘ordinance.’ Gerhard von Rad notes, “To talk of ‘institution’ of the Sabbath would be a complete misapprehension of the passage. For there is no word here of this rest being imposed on man or assigned to him. And yet on the other hand what is spoken of is much more than just something affecting only God himself: even here is possesses

a hidden relationship to the world and man which will, though of course only later, become completely clear. If God blessed this rest, then it is to hand as a kind of third thing between him and the world.”<sup>215</sup> It may well be that God did not assign Sabbath keeping to Adam for the simple reason that Adam had not yet sinned. Apart from sin, one would reasonably concluded that man would imitate God in all things without the interposition of commandment, including rest on the seventh day.

As we move from the ancients to the age of Paul – or Saul of Tarsus – we find that the rabbis had developed a very firm understanding of the Sabbath as the *eschatological symbol of the age to come*. The literature with which Saul the Pharisee would have been intimately familiar consistently speaks of the Sabbath as the weekly reminder and encouragement to those who were looking for the never-ending rest of the blessed age

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<sup>215</sup> von Rad, Gerhard *Old Testament Theology: Volume 1* (New York: Harper & Row; 1962); 147-48.

to come. In the apocryphal *Life of Adam and Eve* we read of Eve's children mourning the passing of their mother, and of the archangel speaking to Seth concerning the days of mourning.

When Eve had said all this to her children, she spread out her hands to heaven in prayer, and bent her knees to the earth, and while she worshipped the Lord and gave him thanks, she gave up the ghost. Thereafter, all her children buried her with loud lamentation. When they had been mourning four days, (then) Michael the archangel appeared and said to Seth: 'Man of God, mourn not for thy dead more than six days, for on the seventh day is the sign of the resurrection and the rest of the age to come; on the seventh day the Lord rested from all His works.'<sup>216</sup>

A. T. Lincoln writes, "In rabbinic Judaism, the age to come was often described as the 'world which is entirely sabbath' or the 'day which is entirely sabbath.' Often this is with reference to Psalm 92 - 'A psalm for the world to come, for the day which will be entirely sabbath and rest in eternal life.'<sup>217</sup> Schweid also sees the forward perspective of the weekly Sabbath, even though it is mainly a



Andrew T. Lincoln (b. 1944)

'remembrance' of a past event - Creation. He writes, "By its very repetition, the Sabbath accords cyclical cosmic time a purposeful direction from Creation to Redemption, setting sabbatical and jubilee years...As a recollection of Creation, it testifies to the wholeness of Creation."<sup>218</sup> But Creation is no longer 'whole' because of human sin, and thus the Sabbath even more stands as an eschatological marker pointing the way of faith to the eternal sabbath rest to come. If this sounds a bit like the letter to the Hebrews, it should; this was the 'sabbath-thinking' of Second Temple Judaism and therefore the 'sabbath-thinking' of the authors of the New Testament.

Both Schweid as a Jewish writer and several Protestant authors note that the institution of Sabbath observance as part of the Ten Commandments ties this eschatological

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<sup>216</sup> *Vita Adae et Evae*; 50:3-51:2 [The Books of Adam and Eve \(ccel.org\)](http://ccel.org) Accessed 03October2022.

<sup>217</sup> "Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament" by A. T. Lincoln in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, D. A. Carson, ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock; 1999); 199.

<sup>218</sup> Schweid; 36-37.



meaning to the concept of Redemption, of which the Exodus is the prime biblical type. Thus Lincoln writes, “The Sabbath not only pointed to God’s creative pattern and purpose but was also a memorial of his redemptive activity in delivering his people from Egypt.”<sup>219</sup> This is, of course, the language of the Letter to the Hebrews. It is beyond the scope of this lesson to exegete the entire passage, but even a cursory reading of Hebrews 3:7 – 4:11 is sufficient to see how important ‘rest’ is to the people of God. A Hebrew reader of this letter would immediately link the author’s use of the word ‘rest’ with the Sabbath, and indeed, a reader of the first century would understand that weekly rest as the harbinger and foretaste of his eternal rest with Israel’s God in the age to come. The unbelieving Israelites were unable to enter into God’s rest, the immediate application of that being entrance into the Promised Land. But the writer goes on to say that even conquest of the land did not constitute Israel’s ‘rest,’ for “*If Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day.*”<sup>220</sup>

*There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.* (Hebrews 4:9-11)

The writer of Hebrews presents this ‘rest’ that remains to be entered as both something that believers now enter and something that will be entered at the consummation of the ages. It carries the ‘Now and Not Yet’ characteristic that we see so often in the New Testament – fulfilled in Jesus Christ yet not consummated until His Parousia. The whole flow of both biblical and rabbinic writings on the meaning of the Sabbath point to its being the sign and symbol of God’s perfected Creation, in other words, the *age to come*. “This rest is an eschatological expectation, a fulfillment of the prophecies of redemption, an entering into that rest which there has always been, from the beginning, with God. In the fulfillment of this hope the whole purpose of creation and the whole purpose of redemption are reunited.”<sup>221</sup> But Lincoln also points out that it would be a

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<sup>219</sup> *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*; 345.

<sup>220</sup> Hebrews 4:8

<sup>221</sup> Gerhard von Rad, quoted by A. T. Lincoln *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*; 209.

terrible misinterpretation of the author of Hebrews to consider this ‘rest’ as entirely future. Rather, it belongs to the present of the believer’s life every bit as much as to his or her future.

While there can be no doubt that the consummation rest remains future, it would certainly be wrong to adopt the position of a number of commentators who hold ‘my rest’ to be entirely future. This would not only be to ignore the evidence of this passage [*i.e.*, Hebrews 4:11] but to miss the structure of the writer’s thought throughout the letter. In the light of this common misunderstanding it is worth stressing from a number of angles that this rest has already become a reality for those who believe.<sup>222</sup>

The author of Hebrews puts this perspective beyond question when he refers to ‘Today’ as the day of salvation. ‘Today’ is the day that men can enter into God’s rest in Jesus Christ and, having entered through Christ, secure their final entry into that eschatological rest in the ‘age to come.’ Lincoln continues, “‘Today’ brackets the period of ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ as regards God’s rest for those who live during the period when the ages overlap. The time for entry into rest is ‘today,’ not after death or the Parousia... The ‘rest,’ precisely because it is God’s, is both present and future; men enter it, and must strive to enter it. This is paradoxical, but it is a paradox which Hebrews shares with all primitive Christian eschatology.”<sup>223</sup>

### **Paul on the Sabbath**

So what was Paul’s attitude toward the Sabbath? As much as Reformed theologians struggle with it, his attitude was ambivalence. On several occasions the apostle could have established the continuity of the seventh-day Sabbath as binding upon Christians; in each instance he refused to do so.

*So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.*

(Colossians 2:16-17)

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<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*; 210.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*; 212.

## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

*One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.* (Romans 14:5-10)

*But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.* (Galatians 4:9-11)

Paul's attitude is described as ambivalence because he does not explicitly address the Sabbath – even in Colossians we find the word in the plural: *Sabbaths*. In Romans he speaks merely of days, as he does in Galatians. Therefore, it is argued, Paul could not have intended the weekly Sabbath in these discussions since that is the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment, embedded in the inviolable Ten Commandments. But the feast of Israel were also commanded as were circumcision and the dietary laws. These latter two Paul explicitly denounced as continuing in force over believers; by implication, the Sabbath falls, too. In highlighting that the Sabbath is within the Ten Commandments, scholars and believers are employing a dangerous hermeneutic we might call the 'Red Letter' hermeneutic. That is, by way of analogy, to say that those verses that are in red letters – *i.e.*, were allegedly spoken by Jesus – are more authoritative than the black letter verses. By extension, to say that the Ten Commandments is more authoritative than the other statutes and ordinances of the Mosaic Covenant has no basis in a sound view of biblical inerrancy. By calling the Ten Commandments the 'moral law' in order to maintain their force is also a hermeneutic that is not justified by the Scriptures themselves.

Another evasion – and this is in the other direction – is to claim that only those commandments that are reiterated in the New Testament continue as binding over believers. This, too, has no biblical merit since it divides the word of God in an illegiti-

mate manner. For instance, the sin of bestiality is not specifically condemned in the New Testament though it remains condemned notwithstanding. Both hermeneutical ploys are too simplistic; the path to the solution lies in what Paul says about the ordinances and statutes and commandments of the Old Covenant: *they are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is Christ.*

In Galatians Paul finds the continued observation of days and months and seasons and years to be deeply troubling, whereas in Romans it is *adiaphora*, a matter of relative in difference. How do we interpret this seemingly contradictory attitude? By the condition of those to whom Paul is writing. It is evident that the Galatians are observing these things as a return to Old Covenant ritual either *in addition to* or (as ultimately is the case) *instead of* faith in Jesus Christ. The Roman believer, however, either observes the day *unto the Lord* or does not observe the day, also *unto the Lord*. Herein lies the ambivalence of the apostle. “Here again, then, it seems that Paul could happily countenance Sabbath keeping; his attitude is that it, like many other things, does neither harm nor good. Like all of these activities, it is a shadow of things to come.”<sup>224</sup> Although Paul uses the plural, *sabbaths*, in Colossians, and merely speaks of ‘days’ in Romans and Galatians, it is impossible to conclude that these broad categories could exclude the weekly Sabbath without explicit notice. “What does this tell us about Paul’s attitude to the Sabbath? The clear implication is that he refuses to dogmatise [*sic*] one way or the other.”<sup>225</sup>

We have further evidence regarding Paul’s ambivalence when we consider from our earlier study of the apostle’s theology, his attitude toward the three ‘markers’ of Judaism under the Old Covenant: *circumcision*, the *dietary laws*, and the *weekly Sabbath*. James Dunn considers these three critical Jewish observations as constituting the ‘works of the law’ in Paul’s letters, though this conclusion is challenged by many scholars. In any event, it is both evident that these three things constituted that which separated a Jew from pagan on the one hand, and were treated with anything from ambivalence to hostility by the Apostle Paul, depending on the situation of the audience. As with the

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<sup>224</sup> De Lacey, D. R. “The Sabbath/Sunday Question and the Law in the Pauline Corpus” *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*; 183.

<sup>225</sup> *Idem.*

food that one eats, and certainly as with circumcision, so also with the Sabbath, Paul refuses to establish it as a *sine qua non* of the Christian life.

The issue for Paul throughout his letters is the *freedom* the Christian has in Jesus Christ. In this regard the apostle vigorously opposes any tendency or teaching that would bring the believer back into bondage to the ‘elementary principles’ or the ‘shadows’ now that Christ, the substance has been revealed. In spite of valiant attempts to read Paul in a different manner, a manner that somehow retains the full force of this or that Old Covenant ordinance, be it the Sabbath or dietary laws or festivals, there is no other way to interpret what the apostle actually writes. He does not oppose individual believers choosing to eat this meat or deny that drink; he does not oppose the practice of circumcision for Jewish believers – indeed, he circumcised Timothy, and he does not oppose a believer who chooses to honor particular days in a different manner than others. Uniformly and vigorously, however, he opposes any attempt to make these mandatory on all believers. Speaking particularly of the feast, D. R. De Lancey writes, “Paul opposes any attempt to make the observance of festivals of the manner of their observance a touchstone of orthodoxy.”<sup>226</sup>

The key to understanding Paul’s view on all things Old Covenant is in that short phrase in Colossians 2, “*but the substance is Christ.*” With regard particularly to the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment, De Lacey writes, “Paul’s attitude toward the Sabbath will be an integral part of his understanding of the role of the law of Moses (or at least the Decalogue) in the life of the Christian.”<sup>227</sup> Paul’s view throughout is that the entire Old Covenant – even the Decalogue – constituted the *shadows* of which Christ is the *substance*. One cannot go back to the Old without abandoning the New; one cannot go to the letter without denying the spirit.

*And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; **for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.** But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones,*

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<sup>226</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*; 160.

*was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.* (II Corinthians 3:4-11)

For Paul, himself a Jew, continuing observation of the Jewish customs was a matter indifferent – he observed the Sabbath, at least when he was in Jerusalem – and continued to take vows, etc. These activities were part of his heritage as a Jew, and his continued observation of them among Jews minimized unnecessary offense. But he refused to grant these activities the weight that they possessed before Christ came – for even the glory they had become as ‘no glory’ when compared to the surpassing glory of Jesus Christ. For Paul, “it was now Jesus, and not the law or the Mosaic covenant, that has become the locus of God’s saving work for both Jews and Gentiles.”<sup>228</sup> Although Paul does not elaborate on the fulfillment of the Sabbath in the same manner as the writer of Hebrews, his essential and consistent focus on Jesus Christ as the complete fulfillment of the entirety of prior redemptive history should convince us that, even with respect to the Sabbath, the apostle saw no need for its continuance now that the substance of it had appeared. There is no reason to think that Paul did not view the Sabbath in the same eschatological manner as the predominant rabbinic perspective of his day, a perspective of which he was an integral part prior to his conversion. But that conversion convinced Saul of Tarsus that God had fully accomplished in His Son all that the Old Covenant foreshadowed. Coming now fully into the light, there was no reason to go back into the shadows. “All the divine fullness ‘was pleased to dwell’ in the Messiah as he reconciled all things in heaven and on earth to God the creator. As with sacred space, so with sacred time. He was in himself the new Temple; now he has inaugurated, through his cosmic triumph, the new Time, the great Jubilee, and messianic Sabbath.”<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*; 161.

<sup>229</sup> Wright, *PFG*; 560.

### The Lord's Day

So what do we make of the 'Lord's Day' as the Christian 'Sabbath'? Does the first day of the week *replace* the seventh? In answering these questions we first take note that *nowhere* in the New Testament does any writer make this transition and call the Lord's Day the Sabbath. "Mention of the Sabbath as part of the significance of the first day is conspicuous by its absence from both the New Testament and second-century literature."<sup>230</sup> Had such a one-to-one transition been intended, it would stand to reason that Paul would fully forbid observance of the Jewish Sabbath as something that has been superseded by the Lord's Day; this he nowhere does. Though he acknowledges the standard practice of meeting on 'the first day of the week,' called the *Lord's Day* in Revelation 1, in I Corinthians 16:2, Paul does not point believers away from the Sabbath to that day. "Not only is he opposed to the reestablishment of the Decalogue as a law for the Christian life, but he is also quite happy to allow the seventh-day Sabbath to be observed – a position quite incompatible with any identification of Sunday as the Christian Sabbath."<sup>231</sup> The problem with this 'replacement' theory is that the seventh-day Sabbath has an intrinsic meaning and cannot be arbitrarily moved to the first day of the week.

It is historically significant, however, that the early Church, especially the Gentile wing, did continue the seven-day pattern of the Jewish people rather than merely adopting the monthly cycle that was universal among the pagan nations. In this sense the early Church adopted the 'sabbatical calendar' that harkens back before Sinai to the Garden of Eden itself. "Thus despite the radical discontinuity involved in the church's beginning to assemble on the first day to commemorate their fellowship with the risen Lord, there is also a definite continuity with the Old Testament people of God in that this was done on a weekly and not a monthly or yearly basis. In this the early church acknowledged the sabbatical sequence of time."<sup>232</sup> That the early believers did meet on

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<sup>230</sup> Lincoln in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*; 385.

<sup>231</sup> De Lacey; 185.

<sup>232</sup> Lincoln; 201.

the first day of the week is undeniable both from the New Testament and from the writings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century. But to say that this was simply a replacement of the Sabbath with another weekly day is to misunderstand both the Sabbath as established by God at Creation, and the Lord's Day. To put it simply, the former is the eschatological hope of which the latter is the inauguration of fulfillment. "Christ brings the spiritual reality; His work fulfills the intent of the Sabbath, and with Christ comes the that for which the Sabbath existed. The reality of salvation rest supersedes the sign."<sup>233</sup>

But choosing to meet on the first day of the week was not arbitrary on the part of the early believers. Although there is no specific passage in the New Testament stipulating assembly on the first day of the week, nor any passage explaining exactly why the early church did this, the significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the first day of the week is decisive. The resurrection of Christ is the inauguration of the New Creation, the Light of the world shining out of the darkness of death. The day of resurrection is that which corresponds, not with the day of rest in Creation week, but rather with the first day of Creation, when God spoke into the darkness and said, "*Let there be light.*" Paul makes a direct connection here when he writes,

*For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

(II Corinthians 4:6)

This New Creation also constitutes the inauguration of the Sabbath 'rest' in its reality, as the writer of Hebrews so powerfully maintains. This New Creation from the dead is what fulfills and fully answers the Sabbath of the Old Creation; *fulfills*, not *replaces*. This reading of original Sabbath alone offers "the possibility of understanding Paul's emphasis on the *present rule of the Messiah* as the newly constituted 'sabbath,' the 'messianic time' in which Jesus himself is now ruling the whole world, following its reconstruction through his death and resurrection."<sup>234</sup> The Seventh-Day Adventist, who thinks he is honoring God through observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, actually

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<sup>233</sup> *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*; 215.

<sup>234</sup> Wright *PF*G; 561.



dishonors the work God has done in Christ and returns to the shadows in spite of the Light having come. The Lord's Day become a day of worship, not merely of rest, in grateful acknowledgement of Jesus' finished work on the cross and through the grave. Worship on the first day is no mere convenience, nor is it simply a way the early church distinguished itself from unbelieving Judaism (to distinguish the church by violating God's Law would have been no cause for celebration). Rather worship on the first day of the week – the Lord's Day – is full of resurrection glory and gladness that are sadly diminished whenever Christians try to reincorporate the Creation Sabbath into the mix again. A. T. Lincoln summarizes well,

From the perspective of this new order, various New Testament writers are able to see Jesus' whole mission in terms of its fulfillment of Sabbatical motifs and Sabbath demands. Christ is the one who has brought the true Sabbath rest of the end times into the course of history, and, though Jewish Christians continued to observe them, the Sabbath aspects of the Mosaic economy were no longer binding on believers. Instead, the first day of the week assumed increasing importance because it was associated with Christ's resurrection and His appearances on the first day of the week, and the day became known as the Lord's Day. Its significance was in terms of worship of the risen Lord and there was no transference to this day of the necessity for the physical rest that was the constitutive element of the Old Testament Sabbath and its demands.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Lincoln, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*; 346.

**Lesson 10 – Men & Women in the Church – Part I**

**Text: Galatians 2:28-29; Romans 8:16-17; Titus 3:4-7; I Peter 3:7**

*“The distinctions between male and female are part of the created order, and Paul apparently did not think that redemption in Christ negated creation.”*  
(Thomas Schreiner)

About thirty-five years ago, a famous Bible teacher in the U. S. – Baptist by denominational persuasion – was teaching on the Pastoral Epistles. The passage for the session was I Timothy 2:8-15, where the apostle sets down the principle, *“I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man, but to be in silence.”*<sup>236</sup> The Bible teacher read the passage and then remarked, “If you think I’m going to touch that with a ten-foot pole, you’re crazy” or words to that effect. And the effect was, of course, a great deal of laughter from the audience. Sadly, however, the teacher was true to his word and proceeded directly to Chapter 3. International Bible teacher, with dozens of published books and commentaries, afraid to ‘touch’ a passage that deals with women in the church. That is the state of biblical exegesis in much of the Western Church with regard to the role of men and women – and *particularly* women – in the assembly of believers.

This should not surprise anyone, for conflict between the sexes was a direct result of the Fall, as succinctly stated in Genesis 3:16. The event, of course, was the deception of the woman by the serpent, leading to both the woman and then the man with her, eating from the forbidden tree. Verse 16 lies within the ‘curse’ pronounced upon the woman, Eve.

*I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception;  
In pain you shall bring forth children;  
Your desire shall be for your husband,  
And he shall rule over you.* (Genesis 3:16)

The highlighted phrase summarizes the relationship between men and women, and especially between husband and wife, from that time forward. The phraseology is not direct, but we have an almost equal parallel only one chapter away, in Genesis 4. In

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<sup>236</sup> I Timothy 2:12

this narrative Cain is upset because his offering was rejected by God, while his brother's offering was favored. God warns Cain,

*So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. **And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.**"* (Genesis 4:6-7)

From this account, in which the 'desire' is clearly illegitimate and the 'rule' is of necessity, we see that the role of husband and wife will forever involve what can only be called a power struggle. This condition is on account of sin, to be sure, and is exacerbated by the dynamics of the first sin event: the woman *deceived*; the man *deliberately* listening to the voice of his wife. This is a point that Paul will refer to in that passage the famous Bible teacher was so unwilling to touch. But there can be no complete and comprehensive discussion of life in the Church without 'touching' such passages as I Timothy 2, I Corinthians 11 and 14, Ephesians 5, and Galatians 2. This is because of the fact that the man/woman couplet is among the various couplets of Paul – Jew/Greek, slave/free, etc. – the only one that is *essential* to the human condition, the only one that speaks to 'humanity' as originally constituted by God at Creation.

But what Paul does have to say about this relationship has by no means satisfied all of his readers. To some he was a libertine, to others a misogynist. To some he granted too much liberty and (even) authority to women in the church, to others not nearly enough. To touch on these passages in the Pauline corpus is necessary, but it must be done in full recognition – inasmuch as possible – of one's own personal bias and prejudice. One's own cultural setting must be considered, not as a hermeneutical basis by any means, but as the undeniable framework through which Paul's words are inevitably going to be set. Many in our day are advocating a repressive form of patriarchy while others are demanding a removal of all sexual distinctions in the ministry of the church. The first are perhaps motivated by a fear of incipient liberalism; the second from an anger over past misogynistic oppression. Both the Scylla of liberalism and the Charybdis of repression are historically and presently real in the church, but neither

fear nor anger can be proper attitudes through which to '*rightly handle the Word of truth.*'<sup>237</sup>

The topic itself is of even greater importance in our day as gender distinctions are being destroyed in the public square, and people are being told that they have the freedom to 'choose their pronouns.' Does God's Word have anything to say to this highly disturbing phenomenon? All professing believers would argue that it does, though the Church has not often spoken with a single voice on the matter. To conservatives, any 'authority' granted to women in the church is a step onto that slippery slope that leads to liberalism and abandonment of the infallible Word. To the believing woman, however, that same Word calls her a 'co-heir' in Christ, one who has received the same outpouring and indwelling of the Holy Spirit as has her believing husband. To be denied the exercise of that precious and gracious gift on account of her sex can rightly be viewed as a 'grieving' of the Spirit who alone distributes His *charismata* to *each one* just as He wills. Frankly, the burden of proof must rest on the one who would *deny* spiritual function in the church to women rather than on the believing women to *demand* it.

Paul is at the center of the controversy in the modern church, and it will be to his writings that we will turn in an attempt to properly interpret the various things he does speak to the matter. However, if we are to gain any sense of the authoritative nature of Paul's teaching we must first establish what Paul himself would have believed concerning the nature of man and woman, and their respective standing *before God*. We accept that the apostle believed the Scriptures that he held in his hands – our Old Testament – and that redemption in Jesus Christ did in no way negate those Scriptures. We have also established that Paul lived in an age that was earnestly anticipating the 'end of the age' as prophesied in those Scriptures, and that he recognized the fulfillment of the Jewish eschatological hope in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Believers now live as New Men in a New Creation in Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit and bound together as the true temple of God. Thus the unified message of the Scriptures is re-calibrated in the light of the fulfillment of the eschatological promises. So, as Paul refers frequently

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<sup>237</sup> II Timothy 2:15

## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

in this matter to Genesis and the creation of Man and Woman, that is where we should begin in order to lay the foundation from which the apostle built his doctrine of ‘men and women in the Church.’

It is all the more important to go back to the beginning, meaning Genesis, because of Paul’s use of couplets or antitheses between different groups of people within the believing community, the church. The basic message in each passage where Paul sets Jew and Gentile, slave and free man, male and female opposite one another, is to point out that each antithesis falls to the ground ‘in Christ.’ The classic passage pertaining to the new identities of men and women in the church is Galatians 3:28, which we will investigate more fully later in this lesson. For now it suffices to recognize the common thread among the ‘neither \_\_\_\_\_ nor \_\_\_\_\_’ passages as displayed in Galatians 3.

*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.* (Galatians 3:26-29)

All believers are ‘sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus’ and as such are ‘heirs according to the promise.’ But among the couplets there is another distinction: only one of them touches upon the essence of being human – the male/female antithesis. All other distinctions - Jews or Gentile, Scythian, barbarian, slave or free – speaks to social, racial/ethnic, or economic distinctions that are a product of the development of the human race *post-Fall*; none of them speak to a created condition of mankind in its totality. This means that the male/female antithesis has both a deeper and more significant (and, consequently, more difficult) impact on relationships within the church because it is not merely a condition of one’s birth or one’s socio-economic status: it reflects the total essence of Man as created in the image of God. Paul will refer to this reflection in some of the key passages to be investigated in this study, proving that this particular couplet is unique among the sets.

However, there is a commonality between the different antitheses in their practical outworking in the church. That is, that although there is now no longer Jew or Gentile, the distinction between Jew and Gentile remains. The Jew does not become a Gentile, nor the Gentile a Jew, and in Paul's writings to the churches these two ethnic distinctions remain. The same is true for the slave and the free man – their socio-economic situation does not necessarily change in Christ. Slaves in the church are not to view themselves as no longer bound to their master, though they are encouraged to obtain their freedom if it becomes possible. In short, a pattern is established within the couplets that must continue with the male/female antithesis: there is no longer a distinction *in Christ*, though there remains a distinction *in the church*. In this we once again find the 'Now and Not Yet' tension of New Testament teaching, especially that of the Apostle Paul. And in this 'Now and Not Yet' we will also discover the basis for some of the struggles that Paul addresses in the churches at Corinth (I Corinthians) and Ephesus (I Timothy). But more of that later.

Because the male/female couplet is unique among the various antitheses that Paul sets forth, and because this particular antithesis speaks to the very nature of man as created in the image of God. We must first go back to Genesis to discover what Paul believed – and, of course, what we should believe – concerning the man and the woman. In the first three chapters of Genesis we will find the fundamental relationship of



Ray Ortlund, Jr. (b. 1950)

Man and Woman as *equal* with *subordination*. That second word is immediately offensive in our day, with 'subordination' meaning 'repression' to many. However, we will see that in Paul's understanding this subordination is nothing different than the relationship between the first and second Persons of the Godhead: the Father and the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The differentiation of the human between *man* and *woman* was not a matter of reproductive convenience. Rather, it was the fullest dis-

play of the *imago Dei* possible. Raymond Ortlund, Jr. writes, “This profound and beautiful distinction, which some belittle as ‘a matter of mere anatomy,’ is not a biological triviality or accident. It is God who wants men to be men and women to be women; and He can teach us the meaning of each, if we want to be taught.”<sup>238</sup>

### Equality with Subordination

As noted above, there is a strong movement even within evangelicalism today that equates the word ‘subordination’ with ‘inferiority’ and ‘repression.’ This development should not surprise us, as the idea of the Son being subordinate to the Father led to the early church heresies in which Christ was a lesser god, or the highest created being but not God. There is a great deal of confusion in our culture as to what constitutes a person’s *essence* and what are merely *roles*. While it may be true that if you are not the lead dog the view never changes, it still takes all of the dogs to pull a winning sled. That there should be subordination among equals between the male and the female is certainly no more repressive than that there is subordination between the Son and the Father, and the latter fact is powerfully established by Jesus himself. Furthermore, Paul establishes subordination among the men of the church without ever implying that there is any distinction in worth among them. Thus it is crucial here at the outset that we disabuse ourselves of any false notions concerning the word ‘subordination.’

However, subordination is the secondary principle of Genesis; equality is the first principle. It is beyond question that the *imago Dei* is shared equally between Man and Woman; in this there is no distinction.

*Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.* (Genesis 1:26-27)

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<sup>238</sup> Ortlund, Raymond C., Jr. “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, John Piper & Wayne Grudem, ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books; 2021); 125.

Verse 27 is quite clear, from a foundational perspective, on the equality of Man and Woman in terms of bearing the divine image. The Hebrew word *adam* simply means ‘man,’ and in Man God created both male and female. It is a mystery to be referenced in the second chapter, but it can be said that *neither* the male *nor* the female is the full representative of the *imago Dei*, but both are together. Biblically, however, this does not diminish the divine representation of any individual human – it is the *imago Dei* that forms the judicial basis for the condemnation of murder (*cp.* Genesis 9:6; James 3:9). Rather, this mystery exalts the essential worth of every human being, male and female, while at the same time elevating *marriage* to the highest possible consideration (*cp.* Genesis 2:24). The ‘one flesh’ of marriage is, as a type, the re-union of the *imago Dei* that was created from the dust of the ground. Thus it also will stand for Paul as the earthly image of the union of Christ with His Church; as the apostle says, a mystery (*cp.* Ephesians 5:32).

What is pertinent to our current discussion, however, is that God did not create the male and the female of our species in the same manner: out of the dust of the ground. This He did once, and He called the creature thus made, *Adam* – Man. Thus the name given to the human race is ‘Man,’ not Woman. Indeed, the woman’s name will come from the man (who also named all the other creatures), and will be a derivative of his own name. This narrative, in Genesis 2, takes us from the complete *ontological* equality of Man and Woman to the equally biblical doctrine of male headship.

*And the LORD God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.* (Genesis 2:18-22)

Paul summarizes this aspect of Creation in one of the key passages in his epistles that deal with the relationship between men and women in the church: Man was not



made for woman, but woman for man (*cp.* I Corinthians 11:9). The fact that Man was created in one manner and woman in another furnished the basis for biblical differentiation between two who are essentially equal. “God did not create man and woman in an undifferentiated way, and their mere maleness and femaleness identify their respective roles.”<sup>239</sup> Furthermore, God left it to the Man to ‘name’ the woman, as He had left it to Adam to name all of the creatures. “God did not explain to the woman who she was in relation to the man, although He could have done so. He allowed Adam to define the woman, in keeping with Adam’s headship.”<sup>240</sup> It is remarkable what name Adam did give to the Woman: *isha*, because his own differentiated name (man) is *ish*.

*This is now bone of my bones  
And flesh of my flesh;  
She shall be called Woman (Isha),  
Because she was taken out of Man (Ish). (Genesis 2:23)*

And this ‘naming’ is immediately followed by the ‘one-flesh’ foundation for marriage, as *Ish* and *Isha* reunite to form ‘Man.’

But this whole process of the creation of Woman deserves closer analysis. We must note that God brought all of the creatures before Adam, not only that he should name them, but to show that none of them were ‘suitable’ for him as a helper. These would include animals that man would later hunt, animals that he would domesticate, and animals that would become beasts of burden to man. Contrary to the adage that a dog is a man’s best friend, the dog was not found ‘suitable’ for Adam. This is a very critical insight: none of the adjectives that pertain to the myriad of animals that Man would later domesticate, hunt, or subdue to labor are applicable to Woman. This is a fundamental tenet in true, biblical subordination – it is unlike any other subordination of Man over Creation – *none*, absolutely *none* of the characteristics of the animal kingdom were deemed ‘suitable’ for Man. That is because Woman is *none* of these things to Man. Fee writes, “She is thus man’s glory because she ‘came from man’ and was created

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<sup>239</sup> Ortlund, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*; 128.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*; 129.

‘for him.’ She is not thereby subordinate to him, but necessary for him. She exists to his honor as the one who having come from man is the one companion suitable to him, so that he might be complete and that together they might form humanity.”<sup>241</sup> A settled understanding of this would have prevented a great deal of misogyny and repression in the name of religion throughout history.

Man and Woman: essentially equal in the *imago Dei* yet differentiated both in the manner of their ‘birth’ and in their respective roles before God. This difference in role is now set before us in the narrative of the Fall in Genesis 3, again a passage to which Paul will refer in the sections of his epistles so vehemently debated within evangelicalism. The passage in Genesis is as critical to a biblical understanding of Man and Woman as either of the other two already reviewed, but it is last in order of both chronological and anthropological importance. This is because the Fall manifests the truth that, for all their equality as image-bearers of God, the Man and the Woman did not stand before God in the same position. *Ish* was to be the head of *Isha*, and in this role he both failed and was held entirely responsible. Let us consider the passage in its several sections.

*Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’” Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. **She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.** Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.*

(Genesis 3:1-7)

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<sup>241</sup> Fee, *I Corinthians*; 517. Fee is using the word ‘subordinate’ in its modern, pejorative sense and does not deny, in his commentary, the ‘headship’ of man vis à vis woman.

We cannot do full justice to this succinct but powerful narrative that lies at the root of all human misery, but can only offer a few observations pertinent to our current discussion. The passage is quite vivid, and its contents have been fairly accurately portrayed in art. To be sure, some artists portray Eve *alone* with the serpent, but the text is quite clear that her husband was *with her* the entire time. Paul probably alludes to this fact when, in I Timothy 2, he writes that it was not Adam who was deceived, but rather the woman (*cp.* I Timothy 2:14). The image is of the Man and the Woman together in the Garden when the serpent approached the Woman and began to deceive her. At any point, it would seem, Adam could have spoken up and settled the matter once and for all. It is evident from the overall narrative that the prohibition concerning the fruit of that one tree was not related directly from God to the Woman, but rather came to her from the Man. It has been pointed out that even her recollection of the prohibition exaggerates the edict of God (He did not forbid the touching of the fruit, though one can imagine how that initial step would lead to the step – eating – that was, in fact, prohibited). Having witnessed the deception of the serpent, and listened to his honied lies, Adam willingly took the fruit from the hand of his wife, and ate.



Temptation in the Garden

*And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate." And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."* (Genesis 3:8-13)

The narrative continues with what appears to have been a regular communion between the Man and the Woman and God, in the 'cool of the day,' presumably evening. The consequence of the eating of the forbidden fruit shows the position of respon-

sibility occupied by Adam. First, it is Adam whom God seeks, “*Adam, where are you?*” and not his wife. We should not think for a moment that God did not know where Adam was but was rather drawing out of the Man the awareness and responsibility for his sin - something that Adam will fail to do, blaming rather his wife for the debacle. In an even more remarkable twist, showing the immediate and deep corruption of sin, Adam blames God in a backhanded manner, “*The woman you gave to me...*” Adam tried to skirt responsibility, but God would have none of it. In the three stanzas that follow, each directed at a member of the trinity of evil - the Man, the Woman, and the serpent - it is only in the stanza directed at the Woman in which we find no mention of ‘curse.’ Consequence, yes; but curse, no. Note that only the serpent is cursed directly. Indeed, in the midst of the curse pronounced upon the serpent, we discover that the Woman will be the progenitor of the Promised One who would redeem God’s Creation from sin and curse.

*So the LORD God said to the serpent:*

*“Because you have done this, **you are cursed** more than all cattle,  
And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go,  
And you shall eat dust all the days of your life.*

*And I will put enmity between you and the woman,*

*And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head,*

*And you shall bruise His heel.”*

(Genesis 3:14-15)

Childbirth plays an important role in the history of womanhood, a point that Paul enigmatically refers to in I Timothy 2:15, “*But women shall be preserved (lit. ‘saved’) through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.*” Child-bearing would, per the word pronounced upon the serpent. Eventually bring forth the Redeemer, and Genesis 3:15 - though spoken to the evil one - is rightly considered the *protoevangelium* - the ‘first gospel.’

Pain in childbirth is the consequence of the Woman’s failure (one even hesitates to call it sin, though it was definitely that, because it was not the sin that brought the race into corruption). She is not ‘cursed,’ nor even is childbirth ‘cursed,’ only what

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would have been a painless joy has now become the epitome of pain in the normal course of human life.

*To the woman He said:*

*“I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception;  
In pain you shall bring forth children;  
Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”*

(Genesis 3:16)

In addition to the travail of labor, this word to the Woman includes the classic description of the now-corrupt relationship between her and her husband. We saw above how the last clause of Genesis 3:16 parallels the divine warning to Cain in Genesis 4:7. The ‘desire’ of the woman toward her husband is an unholy and illicit desire; the man must retain his responsible headship. Man, however, is off to a very poor start in Adam.

It cannot be overstated how significant it is that the lineage of redemption begins with the Woman, a thought completely contrary to paradigm of human worth in the ancient world. Woman would be the source of redemption; Man, however, continues to be the party responsible for the need of redemption. Note carefully, however, how God phrases His pronouncement upon Adam. Only in this pronouncement do we find, as it were, an explanatory prologue from God.

*Then to Adam He said, “**Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’:***

*“Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it*

*All the days of your life.*

*Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field.*

*In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground,*

*For out of it you were taken;*

*For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”*

(Genesis 3:17-19)

As noted above, Adam is not cursed directly; only the serpent is cursed directly. The indirect curse upon Adam is not that he will have to work, but that his work will be met with struggle, futility, failure, and ultimately death. Ortlund writes, “work is not

Adam's punishment, just as childbearing was not Eve's punishment. The new punitive element is his pain in working the ground and his ultimate defeat in it. After a lifetime of survival by the sweat of his brow, the ground from which he was first taken will swallow him up in death."<sup>242</sup>

This analysis of the creation and relationship of the Man and the Woman in the first three chapters of Genesis is not fabricated to meet any modern agenda, but is the same perspective that Paul has toward these seminal events in the history of the human race. Though it does not pertain to the relationship between men and women, the apostle's treatise on the advent of sin in Romans 5 confirms the priority of responsibility held by Adam, through whom alone sin entered the race.

*Therefore, just as **through one man** sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned – (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.*  
(Romans 5:12-14)

The Redeemer would come through the Woman as the Seed of Woman; but the Redeemer would be a Man. The headship of the male is thus established in the biblical account of both Creation and the Fall. That male headship will then dominate the progressive revelation of God's redemptive history – with men being the primary objects of covenant, of government, of worship in the midst of God's people. The male role will be predominant, but it will not be solitary as the continued participation of women in the history of redemptive is significant in and of itself and foreshadowing of the restoration of all things in the Seed of Woman. To be sure, women in significant redemptive roles are the exception in the Old Testament, but it would be a mistake – and a gross misrepresentation of divine providence – to think that such exceptions were either arbitrary, necessary, or unimportant.

An analogy might be helpful here. Only two men are mentioned in the Old Testament as having left this world without tasting of death: Enoch and Elijah. Clearly

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<sup>242</sup> Ortlund, *RBMW*; 138.

these two represent an exception to the rule that *“it is appointed unto man once to die, and then comes judgment.”*<sup>243</sup> But who would argue that these two exceptions were arbitrary or meaningless? Rather they stand as a reminder of the fact that it is death that is exceptional, and that there will come a day when *“we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed”* and the corruptible will be exchanged for the incorruptible in Jesus Christ. Enoch and Elijah are exceptions that indeed prove the ‘rule’ of death, but also they stand as foretastes of the promised translation of all those who are alive at Christ’s *Parousia*. Analogous to this, it will be argued that women who clearly possessed ‘exceptional’ roles within redemptive history as recorded in the Old Testament were themselves harbingers of a time when, as prophesied by Joel, God would *“pour out My Spirit on all flesh... and your sons and your daughters will prophesy.”*<sup>244</sup>

### Male Headship, with Exceptions

The first notable ‘exception’ to the traditional male hierarchy in redemptive is, as noted above, Eve. After passing blame on his wife – and indirectly but unmistakably on God – Adam is heard from no more. His wife, however, seems uniquely to have latched on to the promise given of a ‘seed’ who would reverse the corruption that she and her husband had introduced into Creation. She was mistaken in the particulars, but nonetheless correct in the faith and hope. Her use of the word ‘seed’ in the second reference is redemptively significant.

*Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.”* (Genesis 4:1)

*And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, “For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.” And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the LORD.*

(Genesis 4:25-26)

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<sup>243</sup> Hebrews 9:27

<sup>244</sup> Joel 2:28

It probably bears some significance that it was Eve who named Seth, not Adam. Eve's comments in this passage are not referred to as prophesy, but it would be the lineage of Seth from which the Promised Seed would come. Prophesy, however, is a remarkable element in many of the other exceptional women in the Old Testament. As would be expected, there are not many; but those who are mentioned are quite remarkable. And it should always be borne in mind that *any* mention of a woman in a positive manner would be highly unusual in the ancient world, even quite radical. Three prophetesses stand out in the Old Testament narrative: Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah.

*Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them:*

*"Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously!*

*The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!"* (Exodus 15:20-21)

*Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. Then she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded, 'Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun; and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand'?" And Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!" So she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; he went up with ten thousand men under his command, and Deborah went up with him.*

(Judges 4:4-10)

It should be noted that Deborah was not the wife of Barak, but of Lapidoth, a man who otherwise does not figure into the narrative. Also, because Barak refused to obey the command of Yahweh without having the presence of Deborah at the battlefield, the ultimate conquest over Israel's enemy, Sisera, was famously given at the hand of a woman, Jael (*cp.* Judges 4:17-22).



Much has been written about the righteous king Josiah – Judah’s *last* righteous king who “walked in all the ways of his father David.”<sup>245</sup> Little, however, is mentioned about how this righteous king (and the High Priest, for that matter) learned what to do when the Book of the Law was found in the decrepit Temple that Josiah sought to restore. Josiah instructed Hilkiah the priest to seek out the word of the LORD from a prophet, and that prophet was, in fact, a prophetess, Huldah.

*So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. (She dwelt in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter.) And they spoke with her. Then she said to them, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘Tell the man who sent you to Me, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants – all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read – because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands. Therefore My wrath shall be aroused against this place and shall not be quenched. But as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, in this manner you shall speak to him, ‘Thus says the LORD God of Israel: “Concerning the words which you have heard – because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you, says the LORD. Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place.” So they brought back word to the king.*

(II Kings 22:11-20)

We can add to this short list other significant women, two of which – Rahab and Ruth – were to be notably listed in the lineage of the Messiah. Esther would save her people from the wicked designs of Haman, and Abigail would gain renown by disobeying her foolish husband in the matter of providing food for David. If we accept that these women were not arbitrary exceptions to the rule of male headship within the covenant community, but rather were harbingers of the time prophesied by Joel, then we can comprehend the expectation that Paul would have had regarding the relationship of men and women now that the end of the ages had come. If Joel’s prophecy means anything in this regard, it is that the gift of prophecy would no longer be given to women

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<sup>245</sup> II Kings 22:2

*exceptionally*, but in the same manner as it was given to men. Indeed, the daughters of Zion are listed as co-equal in this regard with the rest of mankind. Need we be reminded that Peter quoted this very passage in his first sermon on that glorious, Spirit-filled Pentecost when the Church was born?

*And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;  
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.  
And also on My menservants and on My maidservants  
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.* (Joel 2:28-29)

If the Apostle Peter understood these words to find their fulfillment in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, can it be doubted that Paul was of the same mind? It is a significant question to ask whether, in light of the fulfillment of this prophecy, we should expect women to have *less* a role in the church than they did under the Old Covenant. From what we read in the Book of Acts and in the greetings sections of Paul's letters, it would appear the answer to this question is a resounding 'No.' We have seen how eschatologically-minded Saul of Tarsus was, in keeping with the general sense of expectation in Second Temple Judaism. The evidence of the resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit were the twin pillars of this eschatological hope. It is in this light that Paul's comments on the role of men and women in the church must be read and interpreted, starting with Galatians 2.

### **Neither Male Nor Female**

Those who wish to remove all distinctions between male and female have Galatians 3:28 as their *locus classicus*: "*there is neither male nor female.*" This is, of course, the only place where Paul mentions male and female within the several 'couplets' passages in his epistles; nonetheless, it is here. The conservative interpretation of the passage has almost uniformly referred the lack of distinction in the various couplets to one's salvation, as Luther writes in his famous commentary: "To be brief, all the laws, ceremonies,

religions, righteousness, and works in the whole world, yea, of the Jews themselves, which were the first that had the kingdom and priesthood ordained and appointed of



Martin Luther (1483-1546)

God, with their holy laws, religions, ceremonies, and worshippings, all these (I say) take not away sin, deliver not from death, nor purchase life."<sup>246</sup> This is a true observation, but not one that pertains to Galatians 3:28. For salvation had always been available to slaves in Israel, and even to Gentile proselytes. Nor was any distinction made within the covenant regarding a Jewish man or a woman, at least not in terms of the fulness of their membership among the covenant people of Yahweh. No, Paul is not re-

ferring merely to the availability of salvation to all without distinction; he means much more than this.

Let us consider the context of the much-debated verse 28.

*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.* (Galatians 3:26-29)

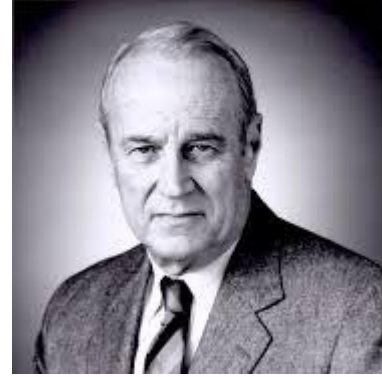
Luther is correct in one aspect of his comment: there is no other path to this condition of blessedness before God other than in and through Jesus Christ. This was, of course, a major stumbling block to the Jews with regard to letting Gentiles into the covenant, but it is not comprehensive enough to explain the other couplets: slave and free, male and female. It is a biblical truth, though not the biblical truth taught in this passage. Paul uses several predicate statements regarding the *all*, and regardless of each individual's ethnic, economic, or gender condition. These predicates are shorthand for all that Paul has written elsewhere concerning each. For instance, to say that *you are all sons of God* refers us to the lengthier statement in Romans 8, for instance, concerning *adoption*. That all have been *baptized into Christ* and have *put on Christ* takes us to Ro-

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<sup>246</sup> Luther, *Martin Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Philadelphia: Salmon S. Miles; 1840); 429.

mans 6 and Colossians 3. Being *Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise* reminds us of Romans 4, and so on. There is a wealth of theology in each statement. "Paul's emphasis is on spiritual status in Christ, 'the spiritual privilege of being the sons of God.'"<sup>247</sup>

But Paul's point here is seen more powerfully in the cumulative effect and impact of the predicates *together*. Consider: *you are all sons of God...you were (all) baptized into Christ and have (all) put on Christ...therefore you are (all) Abraham's seed and (all) heirs according to the promise*. The point here is, it would seem, unmistakable: *each and every believer is a participant in the whole package of*



S. Lewis Johnson (1915-2004)

*redemption in Jesus Christ, without exception and without prejudice*. We have learned from I Corinthians 10, for instance, that being baptized into Christ is the same as being baptized by the Holy Spirit, and consequently partaking of both the Body of Christ and of the *charismata* by which the Spirit animates and guides that Body. This belongs to every single believer, bar none and bar no prior condition of life, status, or sex. Ridderbos comments, "From the point of view of redemption in Christ...and of the gifts of the Spirit granted by Him, there is no preference of Jew to Greek, master to slave, man to woman."<sup>248</sup> S. Lewis Johnson adds, "'If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise,' forms a triumphant conclusion to the apostle's argument. Christ's people are God's sons, baptized by the Spirit into spiritual union with Him, the Son, Abraham's Seed. And if believers belong to Abraham's Seed, then they are heirs to the unconditional covenantal promises in their Representative."<sup>249</sup>

Yet this does not mean, as so many interpret it to mean, that all distinctions have been obliterated in the Church through Christ. Paul continues to speak to Jews *as Jews* and Gentiles *as Gentiles*. He makes no effort to end slavery within the believing community, even sending a slave (Onesimus) back to the master he had escaped (Phile-

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<sup>247</sup> Johnson, S. Lewis "Role Distinction in the Church" in *RBMW*; 203.

<sup>248</sup> Ridderbos, Herman N. *The Epistle of Paul to the Church of Galatia* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1984); 149.

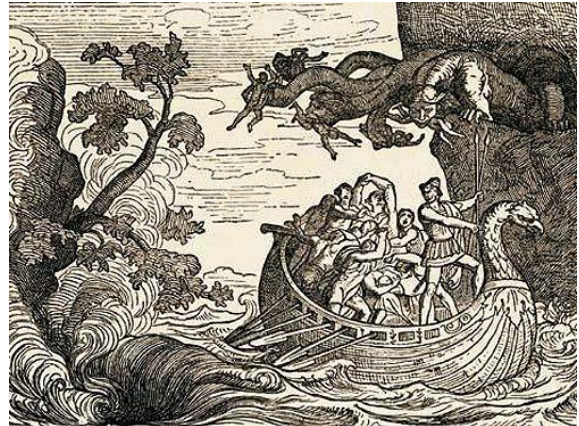
<sup>249</sup> Johnson; 207.

mon). As for men and women, Paul has more to say about that relationship, much of which is enigmatic and all of which hotly debated in modern evangelicalism. It is sufficient for this introductory study to acknowledge that the apostle continued to hold the tension of distinction within equality. We have already established that, though each every believer is of equal worth and status in the church, not all possess every gift, nor do all function in each and every role. But because every believer has been gifted with *charismata*, every believer *does have a role* in the church. To deny that role to any believer on the basis of sex, ethnicity, or socio-economic status would be to hinder, and no doubt to grieve, the Holy Spirit. We must be very careful to have as full an understanding of the biblical guidelines as possible before we tell any believer, 'You can't do that.'

**Lesson 11 - Men & Women in the Church - Part II**  
**Text: I Corinthians 11:3-16; 14:26-40; I Timothy 2:8-15**

*“All too often a superficial and arbitrary exegesis is found which, not surprisingly, serves only to confirm conclusions which have been arrived at on other grounds.”*  
(Douglas Moo)

Mariners who have passed through the Straits of Messina, between the mainland boot of Italy and the island of Sicily, have long recorded the difficulty of the passage. In the days of Homer, the ancient Greek writer of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, these straits were made treacherous by two mythical creatures who stood guard, one on



Scylla & Charybdis

each side of the narrow passage. Scylla and Charybdis – the multi-headed serpent and the lethal whirlpool – threatened all, whether men or of the gods, who tried to navigate between them. The phrase, ‘between Scylla and Charybdis,’ has come into our vernacular as referring to any difficult navigation, but particularly of the intellectual or argumentative kind. It is somewhat similar to being ‘on the horns of a dilemma,’ though the classical phrase carries stronger connotations of disastrous results if ones errs too far on either side.

Another modern phrase that has its roots in the myth is to choose ‘the lesser of two evils.’ This is based on the advice the goddess Circe gave Odysseus when he asked her how he might safely pass between the two monsters guarding the straits. She advised him to row fast and close to Scylla, for it would be better to lose just six men to that six-headed beast than to lose his entire ship and crew to the deadly whirlpool. The modern debate concerning the roles of men and women in the church bears a disturbing similarity to the ancient voyage of Odysseus, with two extreme positions dangerous to the church, and the tendency of scholars and pastors to steer close to one danger or the other, choosing ‘the lesser of two evils.’

## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

As noted in the previous lesson, those two dangerous extremes are, on the one hand, a rigid hierarchical position that effectively robs the woman of her giftedness in the church and, on the other hand, an undifferentiated egalitarianism that destroys the biblical distinction in role established between the man and the woman. In the modern Western church most scholars and a great majority of pastors, have sailed closer to the egalitarian side because that is the way the winds of modern culture are blowing, and it is better to lose six members than to see the entire church fail due to being culturally irrelevant or offensive. Odysseus did not find a way through the danger without losing men, but he did not have the infallible Scriptures to guide him nor the Holy Spirit to lead him into all truth. We have every reason to expect better results than he experienced.

The Scylla to which many modern scholars heave is that of ‘Evangelical Feminism’ for the powerful reason that it is a much more attractive package in our modern, egalitarian culture than the alternative. Evangelical Feminism is the generally accepted title given to an egalitarian interpretation of Scripture concerning the role of women vis-à-vis men in the church, especially regarding *ministry* in the church. On the basis primarily of Galatians 3:28, this view denies any remaining distinction between men and women in Christ, and employs this passage as the foundational statement by the apostle on the matter; all other passages are either interpreted or denied on the basis of Galatians 3:28, “...there is neither male nor (and) female.”



Paul K. Jewett (1920-91)

Advocates of this perspective have largely abandoned the traditional *historical-grammatical* hermeneutic of biblical exegesis as well as the orthodox definition of biblical inspiration and inerrancy. Paul K. Jewett is a fair representative of the position, who in his *Man as Male and Female* first employs traditional hermeneutics to exegete the relevant passages in the Pauline letters, only to then repudiate them on the basis of a

‘new horizon’ hermeneutic. He writes very disingenuously, “Historical and critical studies of the biblical documents have compelled the church to abandon this simplistic view of the divinity of Scripture and to take into account the complexity at the human level of the historical process by which the documents were produced.”<sup>250</sup> In spite of a remarkable conservative and orthodox exegesis of the relevant texts, to which we will refer in the course of our own exegesis, Jewett feels the pull of Charybdis and nevertheless concludes that the Pauline teaching must result in the egalitarian conclusion. Again, he writes, “We have rejected the argument for female subordination as being incompatible with (a) the biblical narratives of Man’s creation, (b) the revelation which is given to us in the life of Jesus, and (c) Paul’s fundamental statement of Christian liberty in the Epistle to the Galatians.”<sup>251</sup>

Robert K. Johnson, Senior Professor of Theology and Culture at Fuller Seminary, throws his considerable intellectual heft into the egalitarian balance. In his article, “Biblical Authority & Interpretation: The Test Case of Women’s Role in the Church & Home Updated,” he lays out eleven hermeneutical principles that he feels are required for any proper exegesis of the biblical text. The first ten are both conservative and non-offensive to any evangelical commentator, but the eleventh is where the cultural-relevancy rubber meets the road: “Scripture interpretation must allow for continuing actualization as necessary implications are drawn out (cultural pressure can be the occasion for renewed biblical reflection and debate).”<sup>252</sup> When running the Pauline passages concerning the relative roles of men and women in the church through this sieve, and especially the eleventh hermeneutical principle he elucidates, it is not surprising that Johnson concludes, “I personally believe such guidelines lead the biblical interpreter to posit an egalitarian understanding of male and female relationships.”<sup>253</sup> It could be argued that the biblical interpreter would indeed arrive at this conclusion, given that

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<sup>250</sup> Jewett, Paul K. *Man as male and female* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1990); 135.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*; 134.

<sup>252</sup> Johnson, Robert K., “Biblical Authority & Interpretation: The Test Case of Women’s Role in the Church & Home Updated” in *Women, Authority & the Bible*, Alvera Mickelsen, ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1986); 32.

<sup>253</sup> *Idem.*



this was the conclusion he or she was heading toward all along, due to ‘cultural pressures.’ Given Johnson’s eleventh hermeneutical principle, it would be amazing if the exegete failed to arrive at the interpretation most suitable to the cultural milieu.

In light of this liberalizing tendency in modern evangelicalism, there has been a renewed conservatism with regard to the issue of the role of men and women, both in the home and in the church. This has given rise to a movement called ‘Biblical Patriarchy,’ in which male headship and female submission is given renewed and expansive expression. This position reflects as strong a hierarchical view as the previous perspective does the egalitarian view. Jewett writes, “A hierarchical view of human relationships in Christian theology is one which says that this headship of the man is a divine absolute, transcending the relativities of time and place.”<sup>254</sup> Many conservative Christians would agree that this hierarchical view accurately represents the biblical teaching,



Doug Wilson (b. 1953)

even in light of Galatians 3:28. But the ‘Biblical Patriarchy’ perspective takes matters even further and advocates a degree of submission of women to men (primarily, but not exclusively, to their husbands) that is very dangerous to the spiritual well-being of believing women, and thus very detrimental to the health of the church. So absolute is the degree of submission required, that it is considered unbiblical for the husband to wash the dishes after dinner. Indeed, Doug Wilson, a leading advocate of Biblical Patriarchy, writes that a wife not doing the dishes in a timely manner could be reason enough to bring her before the elders of the church. Although he has since retracted his comments, they reflect the Charybdis of Biblical Patriarchy.<sup>255</sup> Another website, Biblical Gender Roles, actually advocates wife-discipline, including corporal punishment. It is possible that this website is a spoof, an urban fiction, but it sadly appears to be a *bona fide* view among a group, hopefully a very small group, of professing evangelical Christians. In the article

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<sup>254</sup> Jewett; 51.

<sup>255</sup> Wilson, Doug, “Not Where She Should Be.” Referenced by Rachel Green Miller. [RC Sproul Jr – A Daughter of the Reformation \(rachelgreenmiller.com\)](http://RCSproulJr.com). Accessed 23October2022.

titled, "The Biblical Case for Domestic Discipline," the unnamed author concludes remarkably, "The case could not be more clear that the practice of a man using corporal punishment on his wife, also known as wife-spanking or domestic discipline, very much aligns with the teachings of the Bible. A man using corporal punishment on his wife images God's behavior as a husband to his wife, the people of God."<sup>256</sup> The author then provides an additional link for those who want to 'learn more' about disciplining one's wife.

This is, hopefully, an excessive expression of the Biblical Patriarchy viewpoint. Nonetheless, it serves to illustrate the grave dangers of this conservative whirlpool of doctrine and practice. In Biblical Patriarchy the man is accorded supreme authority over the women both in the home (husbands) and in the church (elders). This is a recipe for oppression and a scenario that has in the past lead to physical abuse. Significantly, however, such an overworked hierarchical system is by no means a result of solid exegesis of the Pauline texts. It is no more than a draconian subjection of women to men that denies their ontological equality on the one hand, and their participation in Christ and His Holy Spirit on the other.

### **Realized Eschatology**

On the basis of Galatians 3:28, the Evangelical Feminist will argue, with some justification, that the burden of proof is on the advocate of subordination. But the answer to this is found readily enough in Paul's letters, in the fact that he maintains the social distinctions of Jew and Gentile, slave and free, in spite of their being no distinction between the members of each couplet in terms of their mutual inheritance of Christ and all that is in Him. This pertains, we will see, to the operation of the Holy Spirit within the church, as He will distribute the *charismata* to each believer, regardless of such previous distinctions as Jew or Gentile, slave or free, and, most pertinently to this discussion, male or female. Still, the argument of the Evangelical Feminist does, perhaps

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<sup>256</sup> "The Case for Biblical Discipline," [The Biblical Case for Domestic Discipline | Biblical Gender Roles](#). Accessed 23October2022. The author does note that if the wife does not agree to such treatment, the husband needs to be careful as he might end up in jail.

unwittingly, reflect a perspective that was prevalent in Paul's day and may have formed the *Sitz im Leben* for what the apostle writes both to the Corinthian church (I Corinthians) and the church at Ephesus (I Timothy).

This first-century perspective is now called 'Realized Eschatology,' a view that can be inferred from the Pauline letters in which believers considered the fullness of the kingdom to already be among them. Acknowledging the 'Now,' they refused to acknowledge the 'Not Yet.' Indications that some form of 'realized eschatology' was prevailing in both Corinth and Ephesus can be seen in the Corinthian view that the resurrection had already taken place and in the Ephesian teaching denying marriage. No doubt the perspective was not held by all believers in either city, but there was sufficient advocacy to cause trouble, and to require a response from the apostle. One aspect of the 'realized eschatology view was the conclusion that all gender distinctions were obliterated in Christ – as the Lord Himself had taught that in the kingdom *"there will neither be marriage nor giving in marriage, but it will be like the angels in heaven."*<sup>257</sup> This argument is still employed by egalitarians today, though Douglas Moo correctly responds in his extensive article on I Timothy 2:11-15, "the assumption that in the redemptive economy sin is overcome to the extent that hierarchical patterns are no longer necessary, lacks exegetical support and is theologically questionable."<sup>258</sup> We have already seen that the distinction between slave and freeman was not pressed by the apostle to the obliteration of that socio-economic conditions in his churches. "Realized Eschatology" may be a real historical phenomenon, but it completely lacks biblical defense.



Douglas Moo (b. 1950)

Rather it is the case that Paul advocated both the ontological equality of men and women as well as the economic subordination of women to men. This realization does move the needle away from the egalitarian position, but it remains to be seen just how

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<sup>257</sup> Matthew 24:38

<sup>258</sup> Moo, Douglas, "I Timothy 2:11-15: Meaning and Significance" *Trinity Journal I* (1980); 80.

far it moves toward the hierarchical end of the spectrum. To determine this, we will engage in as thorough an exegesis of the three major passages – I Corinthians 11:3-16, I Corinthians 14:26-40, and I Timothy 2:8-15 – as will be allowed within the scope of this lesson. The first step will be to investigate each passage individually, followed by a triangulation of the three in an attempt to arrive at a consistent interpretation of Paul's view on the roles of men and women in the church.

It is common among modern scholars to approach Paul's discussions regarding the relationship between men and women in the church from the perspective of the chronology of his epistles. This is a faulty hermeneutic, however, as it is based on an equally modern presupposition that Paul's doctrines *changed* over time. There is the additional problem of this method, that the exact order of Paul's epistles is indeterminate, so that one scholar will contend that the apostle grew more liberal and egalitarian as time passed, whereas another will say that he started out well, but grew more conservative as pressure to conform to the prevailing culture – and abuses in the churches – forced his hand into a more restrictive policy. When a single hermeneutical approach leads to divergent conclusions, one should suspect the approach itself. Consequently, we will approach the three most controversial passages in order of increasing restriction on the speaking role of women in the assembly: I Corinthians 11, then I Timothy 2, and finally I Corinthians 14.

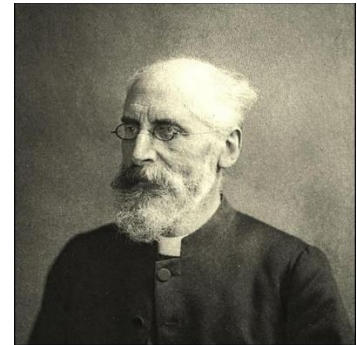
### **Head Coverings – I Corinthians 11:3-16**

*But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God. Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a*

## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

*man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering. But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.* (I Corinthians 11:3-16)

Some of the backdrop of this passage needs to be addressed first, both from an exegetical perspective and also from the standpoint of application. This pertains, of course, to ‘head coverings’ or having the head covered. Frankly, there is no agreement in the commentaries, both modern and ancient, as to what Paul meant by this reference. Today, Jewish men cover their heads when praying; but in Second Temple Judea the data is less definitive. Paul seems to indicate that perhaps the men did not wear anything on their heads – but this would apply only to Jews, as both Romans and Greeks tended to cover their heads in any religious setting, *both* men and women. It has been recorded that Greek and Roman women would show their social status by *not* wearing a head covering in public, but rather wearing their hair up-braided with ornamental pins. There does seem to be consensus that a woman who went about publicly with her hair both uncovered and unbounded (let down) was either a prostitute or acting like one. Alfred Edersheim, usually considered a safe source for ancient Jewish custom, is non-committal regarding the meaning of Paul’s references in this passage. Writing about the attire of a newly married Jewish bride in the first century, Edersheim states, “The bride went [*i.e.*, to the marital bed] with her hair unloosed. Ordinarily, it was most strictly enjoined upon women to have their head and hair carefully covered. This may throw some light upon the difficult passage, I Cor. 11:1-10.”<sup>259</sup> Unfortunately, there does not seem to be any clear insight, standing two millennia from the fact, as to what Paul intended with his discussion of head coverings for men and women. Fortunately, however, that part of the passage is not the crux of the matter, as we will see.



Alfred Edersheim (1825-89)

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<sup>259</sup> Edersheim, Alfred *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* (Grand Rapids: Hendricksen Publishers; 1994); 142

But Paul speaks quite clearly in the passage that a woman is not to be uncovered *while praying or prophesying*. Nothing is said about her normal attire when in public. And it may be concluded without doubt that the context is the *public* assembly of the church and not, as many conservative commentators have concluded, in a private setting. This fact may be established on several points. First, while prayer may indeed be a private affair, prophesying never was. There is no evidence of private prophecy in the New Testament. Indeed, Paul's view of prophecy was unmistakably for the edification of the assembled church and not for private benefit. "Furthermore, while the term 'praying' can describe a private act at home, 'prophesying' really cannot. This term refers to a public act in the assembly of the church. In the Pauline churches, to prophesy is to utter divine truths, under the immediate prompting of the Spirit, in the midst of the congregation, for the mutual edifying of those gathered together."<sup>260</sup>

Second, Paul's closing comment in verse 16, "*But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God*" ties his instructions to the Corinthian church in with the prevailing practices of other churches. This comment is parallel to a similar statement in I Corinthians 14, a passage that no one considers to pertain to anything other than a church service: "*For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.*"<sup>261</sup> Third, there is really no evidence in the New Testament, or early, post-apostolic period for that matter, of 'official' versus 'unofficial' church meetings, private versus public gatherings of believers. Many of the early churches, if not most, met in the homes of those members who had the wherewithal to accommodate a large gathering. There were no church buildings.

Finally, the context of chapters 11 – 14 are quite clearly the corporate gathering of the church, as Paul immediately and seamlessly moves from this discussion concerning head coverings (though that really is not his concern) to the problem of the love feast and Lord's Supper. Jewett writes, "That he is speaking to the woman's behavior in the assembled congregation, rather than in her home, is indicated by the fact that in this

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<sup>260</sup> Jewett; 53.

<sup>261</sup> I Corinthians 14:33

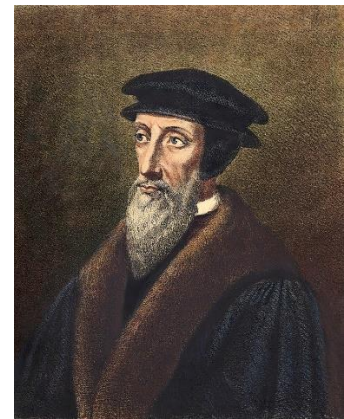
same chapter he goes on to discuss irregularities in the celebration of the Lord's Supper (vv. 17f) which were obviously matters of corporate worship."<sup>262</sup>



Richard B. Hays (b. 1948)

This leads us, then, to the crux of the matter from a practical, contextual point of view: *women in the Corinthian church prayed and prophesied in the public assembly*. Barrett writes, "The verse is meaningless unless women were from time to time moved, in the Christian assembly in Corinth, to pray and prophesy aloud and in public."<sup>263</sup> Thus it is apparent that Paul is not dealing with the *what* of women speaking in church – even as part of the prayer and prophetic ministry of the congregation – but rather the *how* of their participation. Richard Hays comments, "First, we know from I Corinthians 11:3-16 that Paul expected women to pray and prophesy in the community's worship. His major concern in this passage is that they should arrange their hair (or cover their heads) in a seemly manner while praying or prophesying."<sup>264</sup>

Only by recognizing that the apostle is not objecting to the fact that women were praying and prophesying in the Corinthians assembly, but only to the *how* of their doing so, can we make sense of the surrounding material in the passage, from the 'head covering' to the hierarchical statement regarding the Father, Son, man, and woman. To deny that women were speaking in the public assembly would be to completely defuse Paul's argument, for the only thing that was highlighting the problem was the fact that the women *were* praying and prophesying in the assembly, but they were doing so in a manner (and with attire) that was unacceptable to the apostle. Of course, it has been argued that Paul really intended to have the women keep silent in the public assembly, but did not get around to mentioning that



John Calvin (1509-64)

<sup>262</sup> Jewett; 53.

<sup>263</sup> Barrett, *I Corinthians*; 250.

<sup>264</sup> Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperOne; 1996); 52-53.



until chapter 14. This was John Calvin's view on the matter, "The answer can be given that when the apostle disapproves of the one thing here, he is not giving his approval to the other. For when he takes them to task because they were prophesying bare-headed, he is not giving them permission, however, to prophesy in any other way whatever, but rather is delaying the censure of that fault to another passage (chapter 14:34 ff). that is a perfectly adequate answer."<sup>265</sup>

This comment - not unique to Calvin - is tendentious, driven by a 'necessary' conclusion already established in the prevailing culture of Geneva (and most of the medieval and early modern world) that women were forbidden to speak in public. It is by no means an 'adequate answer' that the apostle would lead the believing women of Corinth on in thinking that it was alright for them to pray and prophesy in church, so long as they were properly attired or coifed, only to deny them that right a few chapters



Roger Nicole (1915-2010)

later. Indeed, Paul engages in a discussion in Chapter 11 that has confused brilliant men and women in every generation of the church since his time, when he could have cut to the chase and simply told the women to keep silent in the church. Though it has been standard among conservative scholars to let I Corinthians 14:34 dictate to I Corinthians 11, there are good reasons (to be investigated shortly) to conclude the opposite direction. Roger Nicole, himself a staunch

conservative, writes in reference to I Corinthians 11, "This passage expressly asserts that a woman may participate in worship by public prayer and prophecy, so the injunction of I Corinthians 14:34 cannot be interpreted to mean that her voice should not be raised in public worship."<sup>266</sup> Jewett concludes, "Hence it is certain that in I Corinthians 11 he is speaking of women who were leading the congregation in acts of worship with their heads unveiled."<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Calvin, John *First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1973); 231.

<sup>266</sup> Nicole, Roger, "Biblical Authority and Feminist Aspirations" in Mickelsen, ed.; 45.

<sup>267</sup> Jewett; 53.



Whatever the immediate meaning of ‘head coverings’ in I Corinthians 11 may be, it should be evident to all readers that Paul is speaking here of the relative positions of men and women in the Christian congregation. The head covering, or long hair, is merely culturally indicative of that relationship – the violation of the cultural marker indicates the violation of the deeper principle. “The head covering was a cultural issue, but it symbolized certain values that went deeper than the symbol itself.”<sup>268</sup> This deeper principle is found in verse 3, the key to the interpretation of the entire passage: “*But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*”

Paul makes it clear that this is the key point of the passage by saying, “*I want you to know...*” And what the apostle wants the Corinthians (and all churches) to know is that there is a divinely-established hierarchy even between beings that are essentially equal. As we have already discussed, within the perfectly equal and unified Godhead there has from eternity existed an economic hierarchy, a submission among the Persons of the Trinity that in no way diminishes their unity and equality as one God. That divine hierarchy then becomes the pattern for the human hierarchy between men and women. While the meaning of the head covering and the apostle’s discussion about long hair and short hair might have cultural tones that we can no longer discern, what he says about the Father and the Son, Christ and man, and man and woman transcends culture and provides us with the principle that the cultural example merely illustrates. Schreiner comments, “We must distinguish between the fundamental principle that underlies a text and the application of that principle in a specific culture. The fundamental principle is that the sexes, though equal, are also different.”<sup>269</sup>

There has been disagreement among the commentators as to the order in which Paul presents these couplets: many would have rather seen a more strictly logical order, with “*the head of Christ is God*” at the beginning of the list. Perhaps the order Paul does chose works from the center outward rather than in either an ascending or a descending

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<sup>268</sup> Hawthorne, Gerald F., Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, eds. *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1993); 585.

<sup>269</sup> Schreiner, *RBMW*; 175-76.

order. This would make sense if one considers that the apostle refers to man in verse 7 as “*the image and glory of God.*” In the same verse he calls the woman “*the glory of man,*” being careful *not* to call her man’s image, lest he say too much and be dangerously misunderstood. In the church assembly, then, we find the hierarchy that Christ is man’s head, and man is woman’s head, but the head of Christ is God. Thus the final couplet is a summation, similar to verse 12, “*but all things are from God.*” However we consider the ordering of these couplets, the meaning does not change: there is a hierarchy that does not imply essential difference. This pertains to the man and the woman just as it does to God the Father and God the Son. Indeed, it is strongly implied by verse 10, an enigmatic reference to angels, that the relationship between man and woman is *intended* to mirror that between the Father and the Son. If this is the case, then deviation from that relationship – even the *appearance* of deviation from that relationship – casts a derogatory reflection upon the Godhead.

What Paul enjoins in I Corinthians 11, therefore, is a participation by women in the speaking ministries (though, as we shall see, not the *teaching* ministries) of the assembly in a manner that befits their subordinate relationship to the man. Complete egalitarianism is not taught here, but neither is complete subordination. “Only an unatentive [*sic*] enthusiasm could arrive...at the conclusion that the man is *as* the woman and the woman *as* the man, as though there were no question of super- or subordination between them. God is a God of order; and peace can be maintained in the church only if this order, with the distinction it implies, is observed.”<sup>270</sup> In every culture, not least the Jewish culture, the distinction between men and women is encapsulated in such things as outer attire and length & style of hair. There are social and cultural norms that maintain the principial distinction between the sexes, and this is as God intends it to be. “*A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the LORD your God.*”<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Jewett; 74-75.

<sup>271</sup> Deuteronomy 22:5

**Teaching & Authority - I Timothy 2:8-15**

Next up (or down) the level of restrictions upon women speaking in the assembly is this passage from the apostle to Timothy, whom he had left in Ephesus as apostolic legate. We can discern indirectly from several comments in I Timothy that there was a serious problem with some heretical teachings, teachings that may have indicated both a ‘realized eschatology’ and, consequently, a breaking down of the relationship between men and women. Paul addresses the issue most directly in the second chapter, the context of which also includes prayer.

*I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.* (I Timothy 2:8-15)

It is generally viewed that Paul is speaking of two different things pertaining to the man and to the woman. In the former case, prayer; in the latter, attire. This view is supported by the syntax, but it has often been noted that syntax was not one of Paul’s strong suits.<sup>272</sup> More importantly is the sense of the passage – and the meaning of the *in like manner* linking the two sections of the opening clause. In other words, does it make sense to compare prayer on the one hand, with attire on the other? Or does “*in like manner*” adverbially modify prayer for both the man and the woman? If so, then the contextual basis of the passage would at least match that in Corinth, as we have seen from I Corinthians 11. That is the first exegetical task, then, to determine as best as we can, the practical context of “*in like manner*.”

Normally this phrase – an English translation of one Greek word – is used to describe a parallel manner in which a common action is to take place. Thus in I Corinthi-

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<sup>272</sup> The use of two infinitives, ‘to pray’ and ‘to adorn themselves’ does establish parallel actions according to syntax; the question being if these infinitives establish a parallel according to thought.

ans 11:24-25, Jesus “*in like manner*” took the cup after supper, meaning that He *gave thanks* when taking the cup, in the same manner as He gave thanks when He broke the bread. The common action was giving thanks, the manner in which He took the bread and the cup in the institution of the Lord’s Supper. If the infinitives in verses 8 and 9 are indeed parallel, then there remains no common adverb answering to *in like manner*. If the commonality between the two verses is *prayer*, then there is established a further parallelism in the manner in which prayer was to be conducted. Consider the following outline of the first verses, if prayer is the common act.

<i>I want men everywhere to pray</i>	<i>in like manner</i>	<i>women [to pray]</i>
<i>lifting up holy hands</i>		<i>in modest attire</i>
<i>without anger or dissension</i>		<i>with propriety and moderation</i>

If this is the thought pattern that Paul is establishing in this passage, then we have a direct connection with I Corinthians 11 and not an isolated further comment on the relationship of men and women in the church. The *attire* of I Timothy 2 connects with the *head covering* or other symbol of male headship in I Corinthians 11. In addition, the former passage has established the principle of women praying in the public assembly; this passage would both elaborate and restrict that activity along the same lines as the I Corinthians 11. Thus the apostle is telling the men to leave off angry disputation and the women to attire themselves as is befitting their position, while both men and women come together for prayer. Once again we are assured that these activities pertain to the corporate meeting of believers, as Paul writes in the next chapter, “*These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*”<sup>273</sup>

But if prayer is the lead-in to the discussion, it is not the main point that Paul drives toward. That is contained in verse 12, “*And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.*” Many view this verse as a clear and abso-

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<sup>273</sup> I Timothy 3:15

lute prohibition against women speaking in the assembly, and reference I Corinthians 14:34 in support of that conclusion. On the one hand, there is a *prima facie* validity to this conclusion. But on the other hand we must realize that such an interpretation places Paul in I Timothy 2 (and I Corinthians 14) in opposition to Paul in I Corinthians 11. If we reject, as we must, Calvin's superficial answer to the conundrum, there must be a different explanation to harmonizing these passages. This is, in fact, simpler here in I Timothy 2 than it will be in I Corinthians 14, as the context is clearer and the language is less strenuous.

In this passage the apostle essentially forbids, "*I do not permit,*" women from teaching and/or exercising authority over men, verse 12. There is some disagreement among scholars as to whether the two issues – teaching and exercising authority – are different or are simply the same function viewed in two perspectives. As teaching in the Pauline sense is authoritative in the church, the two concepts are at least closely related. Moo comments,

Two distinct, yet related, activities are prohibited women in this verse...Teaching is ranked by Paul as one of the preeminent gifts given to the church (I Cor 12:28-29; Eph 4:11; Rom 12:7); a gift which he himself possessed (I Cor 4:17; I Tim 2:7; II Tim 1:11); and which Timothy also had been granted and was not to neglect (I Tim 4:11-16).<sup>274</sup>

Paul is clear in this passage regarding the *what* of which he denies to women in the church: *teaching* and *exercising authority*. It is significant that, for the most part, the role of teaching in the Pauline perspective *is authoritative* (whereas, as we shall see, neither pray nor even prophecy is necessarily authoritative). "The authority inherent in the teaching, and thus in the teacher, is indicated by the fact that the teaching ministry was restricted to particular individuals."<sup>275</sup> The apostle lists the 'pastor-teacher' as one of the gifts of men that the ascended Lord has given to His Church: "*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.*"<sup>276</sup> It is

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<sup>274</sup> Moo; 65.

<sup>275</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>276</sup> Ephesians 4:11

also corroborative that James cautions against “*many becoming teachers, for as such we will incur a stricter judgment.*”<sup>277</sup>

The word *teach* and its cognate nouns *teaching* (*didaskalia*) and *teacher* (*didaskos*) are used in the New Testament mainly to denote the careful transmission of the tradition concerning Jesus Christ and the authoritative proclamation of God’s will to believers in light of that tradition: ‘Command and *teach* these things’ (I Timothy 4:11).<sup>278</sup>

Thus it appears fairly clear that Paul, in I Timothy 2, “imposes two restrictions on the ministry of women: they are not to teach Christian doctrine to men and they are not to exercise authority directly over men in the church.”<sup>279</sup>

Does this mean that women cannot teach at all? Hardly, as the apostle also instructs women to teach younger women and, by extension, children.

*But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things – that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.*  
(Titus 2:1-5)

There is even the example of Aquila’s wife, Priscilla (Prisca), who we are told instructed the eloquent Apollos in the way of God ‘more accurately.’<sup>280</sup> This particular couple is mentioned three times in the New Testament, twice by the apostle himself (and once with Priscilla named before her husband). It is significant, however, that Luke is careful in the way in which he records the events, saying that Aquila and Priscilla “*took him aside*”; they did not instruct him during the public assembly. It would be disingenuous to deny that Aquila’s wife had a role – and perhaps the leading role – in instructing Apollos where the latter was in error, but it is significant that the propriety of the couple and the headship of the husband is also assiduously preserved.

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<sup>277</sup> James 3:1

<sup>278</sup> Moo, *RBMW*; 241.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*; 235.

<sup>280</sup> *Cp.* Acts 24-26

Paul, elsewhere, also enjoins the entire congregation – the ‘one another’ verses – to *teach and admonish* one another *with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*.<sup>281</sup> But the ‘one another’ verses need to be interpreted with caution – they often do not imply complete mutuality but rather an overarching principle that is then further defined as to its practical application. For example, although Ephesians 5:21 exhorts believers to “*submit to one another in the fear of Christ,*” the apostle then proceeds to instruct the Ephesians just what that means in various practical, daily situations (*cp.* Ephesians 5:22-6:9). Thus the admonition to teach one another does not necessarily involve women taking a public teaching role over men, and cannot mean that in the light of the specific prohibition of I Timothy 2:12.

But, it is argued from the other perspective, Paul instructs the women “*to be in silence*” in I Timothy 2:12; does this not correspond with the same injunction in I Corinthians 14:34-35, where Paul more forcefully states, “*it is shameful for a woman to speak in church*”? An equally pressing question must be: Can such an injunction be harmonized with I Corinthians 11, which we have seen can make no sense whatever if the women were not vocal, in some sense and manner, in the assembly? Suffice it to say at this point that the *context* of the prohibition in I Timothy 2:12 is that of *teaching* and *authority*, of the woman over the man. This is what is unacceptable to Paul and he grounds that position once more in the lessons taught by the opening chapters of Genesis (*cp.* I Timothy 2:13-14).

#### **Nuclear Option – I Corinthians 14:34-35**

Thus we come to what appears to settle the matter once and for all, a sort of ‘nuclear option’ that some scholars believe Paul employed because of the recalcitrance of the Corinthians, especially the women.

*Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.* (I Corinthians 14:34-35)

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<sup>281</sup> *Cp.* Colossians 3:15-16

Many, like Calvin quoted above, believe that this passage settles the matter in no uncertain terms, and settles it absolutely. Those who think this do have the advantage of the wording used in the passage, for it leaves no room for mitigation of the prohibition. Paul even employs ‘the law’ as backup – though in a way that he never does elsewhere. In fact, this statement opens the door to a problem with the passage, for the law nowhere prohibits women from speaking. Scholars have concluded that the apostle is referring to Genesis 3:16, but that is not a command but a condition of the curse. Jewett writes sardonically, “Surely the apostle knew the Scripture too well to turn a curse into a commandment, a judgment into a mandate.”<sup>282</sup> It may be noted that the rabbinic commandments concerning the synagogue service were very much in line with Paul’s words here: the women were forbidden to speak, *at all*. Could Paul be referring to the synagogue practice? “The law enjoined silence upon the woman in public worship only in the sense that rabbinic authority so construed it by way of a general implication.”<sup>283</sup> This would be an odd statement to make to a church in predominantly-Gentile Corinth, and it would be completely out of character for the apostle to seek legal refuge in rabbinic, rather than biblical, law. “Because no OT text prohibits women from speaking, it has sometimes been argued that Paul refers here to a rabbinic commandment as to current social practice, but such a meaning for *nomos* is unexampled in Paul, and it is overlooked that Paul uses the Law to justify not the silence, but the submission.”<sup>284</sup>

When reading and exegeting I Corinthians 14 one must keep in mind what the apostle has already said in I Corinthians 11. It is not a reasonable hermeneutic to invalidate the earlier passage because of the later, as if Paul somehow changed his mind between chapters 11 and 14. From both a New Testament and an early church historical perspective it may be said, “While feminine silence was literally observed in the Jewish synagogue, it seems that it was not observed in the churches of the apostolic age.”<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Jewett; 114.

<sup>283</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>284</sup> Moo, *I Timothy 2:11-15*; 74.

<sup>285</sup> Jewett; 115.



Hence the interpretation of these two verses must have either a textual or contextual key to unlock their meaning in harmony with I Corinthians 11.

The contextual perspective is similar to our exegesis of I Timothy 2 - to view the prohibition in light of the immediate activity being discussed. In the case of I Corinthians 14, that activity is public prophecy - the very thing allowed in I Corinthians 11, so long as the woman is properly attired or coifed. Paul is again giving instruction not as to the *what* of the verbal worship of the congregation, but the *how*.

*How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. 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 the churches of the saints.*

(I Corinthians 14:26-33)

Paul is continuing his discussion of the *charismata* from Chapter 12, where he uses the same word - *each one* - to describe how the Holy Spirit distributes these spiritual gifts in the church: *to each one individually just as He wills* (12:11). The *charismata* are the universal gifts of Jesus Christ through His Spirit, to all those who are baptized into His name and into/by His Spirit. As we have seen in our analysis of Chapter 12 of I Corinthians, as well as Galatians 3:28, there is no distinction made between Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. Therefore, it is Paul's intention that the charismatic service of Christian worship involves the gifts of *each one*, without distinction. However, without distinction does not, we repeat, mean without differentiation. For in this particular passage Paul is speaking of the *judging* of prophecy: *and let the others judge*. This fact also shows that prophecy was not viewed as inherently authoritative in the early church: all prophecy was to be judged to determine if it was indeed a word from the Lord.

In light of the prohibition in I Timothy 2 against women exercising authority over men, and in harmony with the permission granted women to prophesy in I Corinthians 11, many have concluded that the silence enjoined upon the women in I Corinthians 14:34-35 has only to do with the *judgment* passed upon the prophecies spoken, perhaps even by themselves as prophetesses. D. A. Carson takes this interpretive position: “Women, of course, may participate in such prophesying; that was establish-



D. A. Carson (b. 1946)

ed in chapter 11. Paul’s point here, however, is that they may *not* participate in the oral weighing of such prophecies.”<sup>286</sup> Moo agrees with this interpretation, “In 1 Cor 14:29-33a, Paul encourages worshippers to evaluate the messages of the prophets, and in vv 33bff, it is probably this questioning of the validity of the prophetic word that is forbidden women.”<sup>287</sup> There are several problems with this perspective. One has to do with the situation that was evidently prevailing in the Corinthian church: women were asking questions, something Paul evidently forbids them from doing, requiring rather that they learn at home from their husbands (clearly something that women married to unbelieving men could not do). If this is Paul’s meaning, then it is forbidden not merely for a woman to *pass judgment* on a spoken prophecy, but rather *to ask a question* concerning the prophecy or, for that matter, any other topic in the church.

That brings us to the second problem with this interpretation: the wording is just too comprehensive and final. Using the same word as we find in chapter 11 regarding a woman with her hair shorn – *shame* – I Corinthians 14:35 tells us that *it is shameful for a woman to speak in church*. If the apostle merely meant speaking so as to pass judgment on the prophecies just uttered, his words are unusually unguarded, to say the least. There is a perfectly good and common Greek word for *judging*; Paul does not use that here. Rather he uses the most common word for the most common act of speaking: *la-lein*. If Paul had said that it was shameful for a woman to pass judgment in the church,

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<sup>286</sup> Carson, D. A. “Silent in the Churches” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*; 194.

<sup>287</sup> Moo, *op cit*.

that would accord more closely with I Timothy 2. But what it is he apparently does say is just too absolute, and that has been the manner in which the verse has been interpreted and applied throughout the history of the church: women are to be completely silent in the assembly.

We must consider that this conclusion will render I Corinthians 11 nonsensical and I Timothy 2 superfluous. It is truly the ‘nuclear option’ against all issues pertaining to the role of women in the church – whatever their giftedness might be, it must be silent in the assembly. One wonders why those churches who have thus concluded and thus applied this passage still permit women to sing in the congregation; consistency would debar that activity as well, for singing is just speaking to a melody. Indeed, as we learn from the Psalms, singing is at its foundation a form of prayer, and therefore must be forbidden to women if prayer is also. The implications of these conclusions must be thought through.

There is a minority position regarding I Corinthians 14:34-35 that deserves airing, that the verses are neither Pauline nor original. Such a textual argument should never be made lightly, and never without some evidence to justify the analysis. The evidence in this case is by no means decisive or, to many, even convincing. The two verses in question appear in every manuscript we have of the chapter, though the earliest manuscript that we do have dates from around AD 200, roughly 150 years after Paul wrote the letter. Still, with no manuscripts extant that fail to contain the two verses, any textual criticism has an uphill fight. The only fact that even brings the textual aspect to the table is that the verses are not located in the same place in all manuscripts. While most have them as in our English Bibles, between verses 33 and 36, a number of Latin (Western) manuscripts have them at the end of the chapter, after verse 40. This is significant, though not decisive.

Gordon Fee is one modern scholar who believes the verses to be inauthentic. He argues that the different location of the verses in different manuscript families is significant and must be explained. In his commentary on I Corinthians, Fee refers to the textu-

al guidelines promulgated by the renown 18<sup>th</sup> Century Greek scholar, Johan Albrecht Bengel, whose first principle of textual criticism states essentially “That form of the text



J. A. Bengel (1687-1752)

is more likely the original which best explains the emergence of all the others.”<sup>288</sup> Fee notes that in regard to the manuscript differences concerning verses 34-35, there are three options: “Either (1) Paul wrote these words at this place and they were deliberately transposed to a position after v. 40; or (2) the reverse of this, they were written originally after v. 40 and someone moved them forward to a position after v. 33; or (3) they were not part of the original text, but were a very early

marginal gloss that was subsequently placed in the text at two different places.”<sup>289</sup> Fee, of course, considers the third option to best fit Bengel’s maxim. It is worth noting that the two verses in question do not smoothly fit in either place in which they are found in the ancient manuscripts.

#### Common (Greek) Location

*For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. 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 the churches of the saints. Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. Bu if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.*

#### Alternate (Latin) Location

*For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. 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 the churches of the saints. Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. Bu if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order. Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.*

<sup>288</sup> Fee, *I Corinthians*; 699.

<sup>289</sup> *Idem.*

The fact that the New Testament manuscripts have interpolations is not new – there are a number of places where the text as we have in our English Bibles is suspect. None of these, of course, even remotely touch upon the key doctrines of the faith. Several do – like I Corinthians 14:34-35 – touch upon the *practice* of the church. For instance, the long version of Mark 16 – viewed as a later interpolation by most modern scholars – speaks of miraculous behavior among believer as the norm throughout the ages. Philip’s conditional statement to the Ethiopian eunuch regarding the latter’s baptism, “*If you believe with all your heart, you may,*” stands on weak textual grounds, but is uniformly accepted as canonical by credo-baptists. The judgment between textual variants comes down to whether the biblical text is more harmonious with or without the variant. The absoluteness of the prohibition in verses 34-35 leads Richard Hays to conclude, with Fee and others, “All things considered, the third of these explanations – the interpolation theory – is the likeliest, the one most consistent with the picture that Paul’s letters otherwise convey of the role of women in worship and ministry.”<sup>290</sup> The case, as noted above, is by no means decisive. But leaving I Corinthians 14:34-35 stand as written – either after verse 33 or after verse 40 – creates a conflict with I Corinthians 11 that is very hard to resolve.

### Triangulation

When viewed alongside each other, the three passages investigated in this lesson bear striking similarities, which we would expect they should as coming from the same pen. Both I Corinthians 11 and I Timothy 2 speak of prayer – in the former the prayers of both men and women; in the latter only the men explicitly, but the women perhaps implied by *in like manner*. I Corinthians 11 and 14 are further connected by prophesying: in chapter 11 both men and women do so; in chapter 14, “*For you can all prophesy*” without distinction between the sexes. I Corinthians 11 and I Timothy 2 each ground their teaching regarding the roles of men and women in the early chapters of Genesis, with the former stating, “*For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man*

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<sup>290</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*; 55.

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*created for the woman, but woman for the man,”* and the latter passage declaring, *“For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.”* Furthermore, the issue of proper female attire is at issue in both I Corinthians 11 and I Timothy 2, indicating that the distinction between men and women was of great concern to the apostle. There may be no marriage or giving in marriage in the kingdom to come, but such distinctions are still required in this ‘time between.’

Several points of comparison have already been noted, but bear repeating in this overview. That Paul is speaking in the context of the public assembly and worship of the church seems evident in all three passages, and is made more clear by the common reference to *all the churches* in both I Corinthians 11 and 14. Finally, the common use of ‘shame’ in I Corinthians 11 and 14 bears one final word. In I Corinthians 11 the term is used as descriptive of a shorn woman with the implication that a believing woman who prays or prophesies without the proper symbol of authority over her is as a shameful harlot. In I Corinthians 14 this epithet is applied to any believing woman who so much as speaks in the assembly.

### **Concluding Observations**

The roles of men and women in the church has been a matter of vehement debate and equally vehement disagreement in the modern church, largely because of the changing role of women in the surrounding Western culture. This cultural milieu, however, does not necessarily mean that the church was correct in limiting the role of women to strictly non-speaking in ages past, for that may have been just as much an accommodation to the surrounding culture in those ages, when women had little or no speaking role in the broader society. Acculturation works both ways; we must acknowledge. What matters is Scripture, in any and every age. Thus we can conclude two principles, at least, that are fairly clear from the passages studied in this lesson. The first, is that women are not to teach men or have positions of authority over men in the church. The second is that women evidently did pray and prophesy in the assembly, though the manner of this activity was to be carefully regulated by appropriate, femi-

nine, attire or hairstyle. If these two points are granted, then it becomes a logical conclusion that neither prayer nor prophecy were considered to be teaching or authoritative in the public assembly.

This is counterintuitive to most modern, conservative, and Reformed believers. But Paul's view on both prayer and prophecy seems to be conclusive that the two were not considered to be either sacerdotal (or mediatorial) or authoritative. We have already seen that prophecy was subject to the judgment of the other prophets, which can only mean that prophecy did not stand on its own as an authoritative statement in the manner that it did under the Old Covenant (though even then the prophet's words were to be judged both according to the 'law and the testimony' and as to their fulfillment. Under the New Covenant, believers are admonished by John to "*test the spirits, to see if they are from God,*"<sup>291</sup> a statement that fits well with Paul's guidelines in I Corinthians 14.

Prayer, also, is not authoritative nor mediatorial – though many within the Reformed tradition have elevated this activity to such a role. In the same section of I Corinthians as the passage regarding prophecy, Paul also speaks of being able to say the 'Amen' to what has been prayed (*cp.* I Cor. 12:16). If someone prays in a tongue and no one is there to interpret, then the 'ungifted' – meaning all those who do not have the gift of interpretation – are not able to say 'Amen' to the prayer. This indicates that every believer may hear and test the prayers of his or her fellow believer no less than the prophecies. No one is standing in a mediatorial position of prayer between the believer and God, but all have equal access and equal right to assess and either 'Amen' the prayer, or not. In this we see that, as in I Corinthians 11, woman may both pray and prophesy in the assembly without either teaching or exercising authority over a man.

It must also be stated that, while the relationship of men and women in the church is general, the reference that Paul makes to the first chapters of Genesis do indicate that he is speaking *primarily* of the relationship between a husband and wife. In other words, we may not conclude from his teaching that every believing man is the

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<sup>291</sup> I John 4:1

head of any and all believing women; that is a very dangerous extension of the biblical truth. It seems clear that the 'covering' of I Corinthians 11 is the authority of the husband over the wife, not of men in general over women in general. While it remains the responsibility of the elders to see that all things are done "*decently and in order,*" this cannot give the elders the right or authority over the husband. Unless women speaking is prohibited by the elders *en toto* in the church assembly, then the right of a woman to pray or prophesy in the assembly seems to rest entirely with her husband or father as 'covering' over her.

One final word, then, on the issue of 'covering.' While some women have taken to wearing some form of head covering at all times in the church, it must be noted that this is *not* in keeping with Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 11. While it is unclear what exactly the apostle means by the 'covering' in that passage, it is clear that this covering is to be worn *when the woman is praying or prophesying*. To do otherwise - to wear a head covering at all times in the assembly (and especially when it is forbidden for the woman to either pray or prophesy) - is to indicate a subordination in excess of what Paul teaches. It is to subordinate the woman slavishly, and not merely economically in the ministry of the church. It is to deny her dignity as a joint-heir of Christ, as equally bearing the image of God. This is a grave matter; if we commit ourselves to obey the word as we understand it, then it is incumbent upon us that we do so in the manner in which that word is given and not to go beyond that which is written.



## Lesson 12 – Church Government

**Text: Acts 20:17-28; I Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9**

*“If there is a religion in the world which exalts the office of teaching,  
it is safe to say that it is the religion of Jesus Christ.”*  
(James Orr)

Sometime around the year AD 95, the Corinthian church received a letter from a ‘presbyter’ of the Roman church by the name of Clement. The name was not uncommon, but it is possibly more than coincidence that a person of the same name is mentioned favorably by Paul in his Epistle to the Philippians, which many believe was written from Rome.<sup>292</sup> Roman Catholic tradition lists the author of this late-first century letter to the Corinthian church as the fourth pope in Rome, a ‘fact’ that has no corroborative historical evidence.<sup>293</sup> Yet it remains that, whoever this Clement might have been, he writes on behalf of one church to another church with a degree of authority vested in his office as a *presbyter* of the Roman church. And his main issue with the church to which he is writing is their treatment of their *presbyters* – particularly the unjust dismissal of several of them from their posts.

This *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, while never accepted as canonical in the early church, nonetheless provides a valuable picture of the structure of the church toward the end of the first century, a time when most, if not all, of the apostles had passed from the scene. Here we see the succession of authority in the Church from the Lord Jesus Christ, to His apostles, and finally to the ‘bishops and deacons’ of the local assemblies. Clement shows his own understanding of ‘derived’ authority, dependent on its extent on the one from whom the authority is received.

The apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus, the Christ, was sent from God. Thus Christ is from God and the apostles from Christ. In both instances the orderly procedure depends on God’s will. And so the apostles, after receiving their orders and being fully convinced by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and assured by God’s word, went out in the confidence of the Holy Spirit to preach the good

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<sup>292</sup> Philippians 4:3

<sup>293</sup> Clement does not write as a Roman ‘pope’ with authority over the Corinthian church, but rather opens his epistle, “The church of God, living in exile in Rome, to the church of God, exiled in Corinth...”

news that God's Kingdom was about to come. They preached in country and city, and appointed their first converts, after testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers.<sup>294</sup>

This is one of the earliest references outside the New Testament to the presence of bishops and deacons in the local congregations throughout the Mediterranean world. Clement called the first office 'bishop' not in the sense that this word would have later in the second century and beyond, but rather because the Greek word, *episkopos*, from which we get the English 'bishop,' is one of the three key terms used in the New Testament passages that refer to church leadership: *episkopos* (bishop), *presbuteros* (elder), and *poimen* (shepherd). There is no evidence in Clement's letter that any development of multiple offices had yet evolved from the *episkopoi* – the plural 'bishopric' – in the local church. What we do find unmistakably in Clement is the honor that this group of leaders was to have within the local believing community, an honor that should have prevented the debacle that had occurred in Corinth and had occasioned Clement's letter.

In Clement's view, the plurality of bishops in the local congregation was an evidence of divine wisdom from the apostles in preventing strife over the 'title' or 'office' of bishop. "Now our apostles, thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ, knew that there was going to be strife over the title of bishop. It was for this reason and because they had been given an accurate knowledge of the future, that they appointed the officers we have mentioned...In the light of this, we view it as a breach of justice to remove from their ministries those who were appointed either by them [*i.e.*, the apostles] or later on and with the whole church's consent...who, long enjoying everybody's approval, have ministered to Christ's flock faultlessly, humbly, quietly, and unassumingly."<sup>295</sup>

In this same passage, Clement uses the term *presbyter* as synonymous to the earlier term, *bishop*, when he remarks that those leaders in Corinth who had passed away were happier than the current ones who were being so ill used: "Happy, indeed, are those presbyters who have already passed on, and who ended a life of fruitfulness with

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<sup>294</sup> *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 42:1-4. Cyril C. Richardson *Early Christian Fathers*; 62.

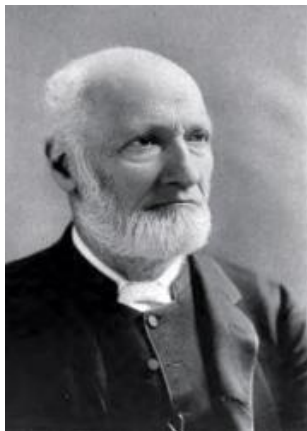
<sup>295</sup> *First Clement* 44:1-4

their task complete. For they need not fear that anyone will remove them from their secure positions.”<sup>296</sup> Several of the current bishops, however, had not been so fortunate and had been harshly and unjustly treated by the congregation in Corinth: “But you, we observe, have removed a number of people, despite their good conduct, from a ministry they have fulfilled with honor and integrity. Your contention and rivalry, brothers, thus touches matters that bear on our salvation.”<sup>297</sup> This last sentence shows just how important Clement, representing the church at Rome, viewed the office of bishop/presbyter – as a matter bearing on salvation.

In contrast to this ancient perspective, more modern scholars often consider the structure of local church government to be *adiaphora* – a ‘matter indifferent.’ George Eldon Ladd remarkably comments, “It appears likely that there was no normative pattern of church government in the apostolic age, and that the organizational structure of the church is no essential element in the theology of the church.”<sup>298</sup> This view is reflected



George Ladd (1911-82)



Philip Schaff (1819-93)

in the many different organizational structures that have evolved in the history of the Christian Church, and the attitude of adherents to each that there is no specific form or pattern established in the New Testament. A century before Ladd, the church historian Philip Schaff wrote, “The most that can be said is, that the apostolic age contains fruitful germs for various ecclesiastical organizations subsequently developed, but none of them can claim divine authority except for the gospel ministry, which is common to all.”<sup>299</sup> These modern comments are remarkable in light

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<sup>296</sup> *First Clement* 44:5

<sup>297</sup> *First Clement* 44:6-45:1

<sup>298</sup> Ladd, George Eldon A *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1974); 534.

<sup>299</sup> Schaff, Philip *History of the Christian Church: Volume I* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1995); 487.

of Clement's words to the Corinthian church, written so near in time to the apostles. To him it was a matter touching upon their very salvation.

Clement's letter to the Corinthian church merely provides further evidence that church *government*, or *polity*, was a matter of interest to the apostles, especially the Apostle Paul. We know from Luke's account that Paul did not waste time in establishing a 'presbyterian' form of government in each local congregation borne during his first missionary journey. He and Barnabus did not depart from the region of their earlier labors without setting place elders (*presbuteroi*) in each congregation.

*And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." So when **they had appointed elders in every church**, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.* (Acts 14:21-23)

Indeed, so important was proper church polity to the apostle, that he considered the appointment of elders as essential to the 'setting in order' the young churches (*cp.* Titus 1:5). If the apostle who was most influential in spreading the gospel around the Mediterranean world, considered the presence of church leadership to be so important as to both see to it himself and to charge his legate with the duty, then, contrary to Ladd's view, it stands to reason that the *type* of church polity he established has strong biblical merit to be considered the normative pattern for the church in succeeding ages. J. Alec Motyer is much closer to the biblical record than Ladd when he writes, "it is not as much as hinted in the New Testament that the church would ever need – or indeed should ever want or tolerate – any other local leadership than that of the eldership group."<sup>300</sup>



J. Alec Motyer (1924-2016)

However, establishing the biblical basis for a church polity and, in doing so, the *elder* form of church polity – does not remove all difficulties from the board. For there

<sup>300</sup> Quoted by Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (Littleton: Lewis and Roth Publishers; 1995); 103.

arises in any consideration of church *order*, the relationship between an established leadership on the one hand, and the charismatic freedom of the congregation, on the other. It is significant that Clement's letter was written to the church at Corinth, as it establishes the historical fact that there existed a 'bishopric' in that city from very early on – one that Clement claims derived *from the apostles*, in this case, Paul. At the same time, it is in Paul's first epistle to the same church that we read of the *charismatic* quality of the Corinthian church, and in a manner that the apostle generally approves – in *matter* if not in *manner*. Can a *charismatic* community co-exist with a structured leadership? Will not the gifts of the Holy Spirit give way – indeed, be smothered by – a clerical, institutional structure? Does actual history not answer this question with a powerful, and distressing, 'Yes'? But once again we are confronted in the Pauline epistles and pastorals with both sides of this apparent conundrum – a *charismatic community with structured leadership and order*. Thus, with both sides presented in infallible Scripture, it becomes each congregation's duty to discover from the Word just how these things can be so.

### Organized Charismatics?

When a 21<sup>st</sup> Century believer reads chapters 12, 13, and 14 of I Corinthians, and then takes a look at his or her own church worship service, there is usually a huge discrepancy between the two. Charismatic and Pentecostal churches, of course, consider that they are in line with Paul's instructions in these chapters, but as we will see in a future lesson on the *charismata*, there is a great deal of guesswork as to the exact nature of the 'gifts' in the first century. Reformed theologians and preachers tend to camp on one theme in the midst of these three chapters: "*For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints*" (14:33) and "*Let all things be done decently and in order*" (14:40). It is hard to deny ecclesiastical bias in both views. There is an manifest tension in Paul's letters between the *charismatic* component of worship in this new age, on the one hand, and the *organizational* structure that Paul himself established in each church. Is the church an Institution or a Charismatic Community? Or is it both? Is it

possible to have organization without quenching the Holy Spirit? It is significant that a passage that speaks of quenching the Holy Spirit, probably in the context of prophetic utterings, also speaks of those who ‘have charge over you in the Lord.’

*And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the faint-hearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.* (I Thessalonians 5:12-22)

If Paul speaks of both ‘charge’ and ‘prophetic utterings’ in the same breath, then it must be a ‘both/and’ situation and not an ‘either/or’ with regard to organization existing alongside the free operation and movement of the Holy Spirit. This is the eschatological people and community of the Messiah, a point that has been a central thread through each of these Pauline studies. To be sure, allowing the Holy Spirit to distribute His grace-gifts freely to each one even as He wills can be unnerving for church leadership. Also it is equally true that manmade ‘enthusiasms’ can be foisted off as genuine *charismata* when they are not. As in most things, there are extremes in the church between a too-rigid organization and a too-fluid pandemonium of the ‘Spirit.’<sup>301</sup>

Historically, however, the trajectory of congregational life has not been toward greater freedom, but rather toward greater rigidity and structure. By the second century church government had solidified into a hierarchical and authoritative structure that would expand immensely over the ensuing centuries – into the formidable structure of the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformation did little to reverse this trend – outside the despised Anabaptists – and Church Polity, Office, and Ordination remains a central tenet in most Protestant denominations. But Robert Banks, in his popular work, *Paul's Idea of Community*, is certainly correct in reference to the Holy Spirit's role in the distri-

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<sup>301</sup> The use of the word ‘pandemonium’ is intentional; the word means the ‘all the demons’ and once referred (in Milton's *Paradise Lost*) to the ‘city’ of the demonic hosts. Sometimes professing Christian churches, in giving chaotic excess to the so-called *charismata*, do not know what spirit they are of.



Robert Banks (b. 1939)

tribution of the *charismata*, “The gifts are and remain his to direct...Although this could open the door to a quite random and fluctuating distribution of the gifts, leading to uncertainty within the community as to the functions different members have within it, the character of the Spirit does not allow this to happen. He acts as the agent of a God who is ‘not a God of confusion but of peace.’”<sup>302</sup> This is a very important point: it is the *Holy Spirit*, not human church leadership, who not only controls the distribution of the grace-gifts but also *maintains order* even in the operation of them. This does not mean that believers are permitted to be chaotic, for “*the spirits of the prophets are subject to prophets.*” But it does mean that God the Holy Spirit knows how to distribute the *charismata* as He wills without creating disorder.

Thus Paul was equally comfortable with the church service being conducted “*decently and in order*” and the communal, Spirit-led, every-member worship in which “*each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification*” (14:26). Banks writes in the article “Church Order and Government” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, “the church’s ‘liturgy’ is a communal construction. Order stems from a highly participatory and charismatic process and is not determined in advance by a few. Though neither purely spontaneous nor fully egalitarian, it is dynamic and mutually created. It is not constitutive of the church but functional and instrumental.”<sup>303</sup> There is a great difference between most modern church services and what we read of in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. “For Paul what happens at church gatherings originates in the Spirit and flows through the whole membership for the benefit of all.”<sup>304</sup> Lest we conclude that, because the church at Corinth was such a problem child, the apostle did not envision this type of service for all churches, consider

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<sup>302</sup> Banks, Robert *Paul’s Idea of Community* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1980); 107.

<sup>303</sup> Hawthorne, Gerald F., Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds. *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1993); 132.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*; 133.

what he wrote to others, including the passage quoted above to the Thessalonian church.

*For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.* (Romans 12:3-8)

*Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.* (Colossians 3:12-17)

*Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.* (Ephesians 5:17-21)

The free movement of the *charismata* under the guidance and authority of the Holy Spirit is, we may conclude, the manner in which the whole body is built up, according to that seminal passage in Ephesians 4 that we have looked at earlier.

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit to-*



## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

*gether by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.* (Ephesians 4:11-16)

It must be noted, however, that in this passage the interaction of the joints and ligaments is itself predicated on the enabling and instructing leadership of those ‘gifts of men’ that Christ Himself has left to His Church: the *apostles*, the *prophets*, the *evangelists*, and the *pastor-teachers*. The body is to grow in a healthy, and not spastic, manner; the building of the church is to be erected on a firm foundation, the “*apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone.*”<sup>305</sup> So we see that there is *order* upon and within which the *charismata* operate both to the edification of the congregation and the glory of God through Jesus Christ. The foundation that Paul lays for an orderly ministry and succession of ministry – more on the latter from the Pastorals – was at the very same time, and in the very same letters, as his teaching on the gifts of the Spirit as the true ‘liturgy’ of the church assembly. This fact shows that the common view that the churches Paul planted evolved after his departure from a ‘charismatic’ to ‘ordered’ service of worship is false, as Thomas Schreiner points out. “According to this view, the genuine Pauline churches were spontaneous, open, free and Spirit-directed, while the post-Pauline churches became institutional, rigid and leadership-oriented, so that the freedom of the Spirit was no longer the norm.”<sup>306</sup> Although this evolution might indeed have taken place *historically*, it was not something that flowed either naturally or inevitably from the apostle’s teaching. “This portrait in which the ‘charismatic’ Paul is posed against the ‘structured’ Paul is deeply flawed. The Pauline churches were charismatic but they were also structured. *Charisma* and structure are not mutually exclusive. Dependence on the Spirit does not exclude order and structure.”<sup>307</sup>

It is hard to see whether there is greater danger to the right or to the left. Is it worse to have unguided enthusiasm, or Spirit-quenching organization? Clearly it is best to have neither, but the history of the church shows that denominations and con-

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<sup>305</sup> Ephesians 2:20

<sup>306</sup> Schreiner, *Paul*; 383.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*; 383-84.

gregations have always tended to err on the side of rigidity and conservatism, with clericalism and sacerdotalism taking the place of the *charismata* of the Pauline churches. Alexander Strauch points out that “The insistence among some that only the ordained may administer baptism and conduct the Lord’s Supper demonstrates the persistence of the sacramental view of ordination.”<sup>308</sup> Strauch goes on to say, “Clericalism does not represent biblical, apostolic Christianity. Indeed, the real error to be contended with is not simply that one man provides leadership for the congregation, but that one person in the holy brotherhood has been sacralized apart from the brotherhood to an unscriptural status.”<sup>309</sup> Strauch concludes, “Biblical eldership cannot exist in an environment of clericalism.”<sup>310</sup>



Alexander Strauch (b.1944)

### Catholic & Local ‘Gifts of Men’

We return, therefore, to the ‘gifts of men’ that Christ has given to the Church upon His Ascension, the four listed in Ephesians 4:11 – *apostle, prophet, evangelist and pastor-teacher*. It has been the general consensus of biblical commentators and scholars across the millennia, to view the first three of these ‘gifts’ as *catholic* or *universal*, and the last – the *pastor-teacher* – as *local*. The reason for this is a somewhat complex combination of biblical text and actual history. On the one hand, the apostles did not make provision for the continuation of their ministry, while on the other hand, prophetic utterances historically diminished and died out in the second century. We maintain that the ‘evangelist’ still operates in the church today – though we cannot thereby conclude that a modern evangelist is the same as the first century version. But we also agree that the modern evangelist, like his forebear, operates in the church *at large* and is not limited to a local assembly.

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<sup>308</sup> Strauch, Alexander *Biblical Eldership* (Littleton: Lewis and Roth Publishers; 1995); 112. Strauch is quoting Marjorie Warkentin.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*; 113.

<sup>310</sup> *Idem.*

The pastor-teacher, however, has been generally relegated to the local congregation, primarily due to the central role that *teaching* has in the assembly according to Paul, and to the fact that this function is mostly assigned to the *presbyter* or *elder*. With regard to the local assembly, there are two categories of men who were ‘under’ the apostolate but ‘over’ the congregation as leaders and teachers. The first, though not explicitly named in the New Testament, were the *apostolic legates* – representatives of the apostle(s) who bore the authority of the apostle, though not directly of the Lord Jesus Christ (as the apostle did). Such legates were Luke, Timothy, Titus, and Silas as well as others who were sent on behalf of the Apostle Paul to individual churches, both to bring letters and to ‘set in order’ affairs at the congregational level. “Timothy was not a local church pastor in the traditional sense of the term. He was primarily – like Titus, Erastus, and Tychius – an apostolic delegate.”<sup>311</sup> There is even indication from the wording used in such places as Romans 16, that women were also employed in this role. Phoebe is called a *diakonon* or ‘servant/ deacon’ (the word is masculine in the text) as well as a *prostatis* or ‘patron’ (again, masculine), signifying a supervisory role in some capacity. In any event, there appears to have been a secondary legion of workers who assisted Paul, at least, and one may surmise the other apostles as well.

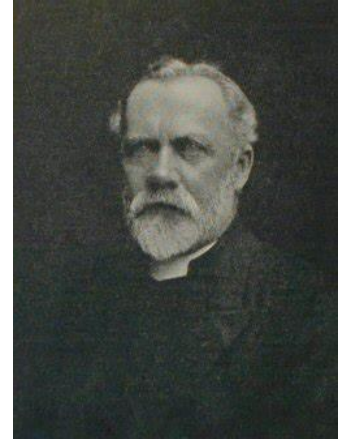
These legates were not a continuing office, but were intended to help the Apostle order matters within the local congregation. Not least of these duties was the appointment of *elders* in newly planted churches, as Paul writes to Titus, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.”<sup>312</sup> This is no more than Paul and Barnabas did on the return leg of their first missionary journey, and thus can be seen to be the standard practice in the Pauline churches. The lack of any evidence of alternative forms of local polity leads us to conclude that the *eldership* (plural) was the intended form of local church government as far as Paul was concerned.

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<sup>311</sup> Strauch; 105.

<sup>312</sup> Titus 1:5

It should be noted in summary here, though it will be developed more fully in the exegesis of the relevant passages, that the terms *bishop* (Greek ‘episkopos’) and *elder* (Greek ‘presbuteros’) were essentially synonymous in the Pauline usage. Philip Schaff admits, “The terms PRESBYTER (or Elder) and BISHOP (or Overseer, Superintendent) denote in the New Testament one and the same office, with this difference only, that the first is borrowed from the Synagogue, the second from the Greek communities.”<sup>313</sup> We will see that the term *presbyter* denotes the office itself as referring to the ‘elder men’ in the community, whereas the *episkopos* denotes the responsibility of the presbyter: ‘to oversee’ the congregation. A third associated word, *poimen* (or Shepherd) denotes the method by which the presbyter oversees the church: as a *shepherd* watching over the flock. Thomas Lindsay writes, “The term ‘pastors’ (*poimenes*) and ‘overseers’ (*episkopoi*) denote the kind of work done, and ‘elder’ (*presbuteroi*) was the title of the office.”<sup>314</sup>



T. M. Lindsay (1843-1914)

We find these three words associated in several very significant places where the Apostle Paul is establishing the form of local church government that, we must assume, he believed to be the will of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church. We also find these terms uniformly *in the plural*, a situation in actual fact that prevailed into the second century, though afterward was lost to the singular ‘pastor’ and eventually, the diocesan ‘bishop.’ Lindsay comments, “Before the close of the first century the labours of apostles (and under this name a large number of wandering missionaries must be included) had given birth to thousands of these local churches. They were all strictly independent self-governing communities – tiny islands in the sea of surrounding paganism – each ruled by its session or senate of elders. There is no trace of one man, one pastor, at the head of any community.”<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> Schaff; 491-92.

<sup>314</sup> Lindsay, Thomas M. *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son; 1902); 152-53.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*; 155.

Subsequent denials that a plurality of elders was intended to be the biblical model of church polity are nothing more than special pleading, arguments made by those who have established semi-clerical or fully-clerical church government in spite of the clear testimony of Scripture. Again, the classic statement of this willful ignorance of the biblical text is the passage in Schaff quoted earlier, “The most that can be said is, that the apostolic age contains fruitful germs for various ecclesiastical organizations subsequently developed.”<sup>316</sup> The fact of the matter is that the only ‘germ’ found in the New Testament writings is that of a local church leadership consisting of a plurality of elders; any other ‘development’ must be a hybrid and, insofar as it deviates from the biblical model, a corrupt hybrid. Let us trace, in general terms, the biblical flow of evidence from the first missionary journey to the ‘qualifications’ of the elder as enumerated in the Pastoral Letters of I Timothy and Titus.

*And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.* (Acts 14:21-23)

Schaff notes that the *presbyterial* (as distinct from the more modern *presbyterian*) form of local church government flowed naturally from the synagogue. Since Paul made it his regular habit of beginning his gospel ministry in any community among the Jews and, if there was one, in the synagogue, it is reasonable to conclude that the early congregations – and the Apostle himself – adopted this form of leadership in the young churches. “As every Jewish synagogue was ruled by elders, it was very natural that every Jewish Christian congregation should at once adopt this form of government; this may be the reason why the writer of the Acts finds it unnecessary to give an account of the origin...The Gentile churches followed the example, choosing the already familiar term bishop.”<sup>317</sup> But it must be noted that there was much of Second Temple Judaism

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<sup>316</sup> Schaff; 487. Schaff was German Reformed.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*; 495.

that the early Church *did not adopt*, and so we cannot conclude that the establishment of a plural eldership in the early congregations was mere tradition or convenience. As a Jewish tradition, it was *sanctioned* by the actions and writings of the apostle.

*From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. "And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.* (Acts 20:17-31)

This is the most significant historical passages concerning the antiquity of the *presbyterial* form of local church government. Ephesus was primarily a Gentile city and, while there were undoubtedly some Jews among the congregation there, it was most likely predominantly Gentile. Thus we see at the end of Paul's life the fact that he had already fully established a plurality of elders in the Gentile churches, as he had done in the early years of his ministry; no evolution of doctrine or practice here. Also possibly significant is that Paul calls for the *elders* but does not call for Timothy, his legate in Ephesus. Now this is by no means a definitive point, as we do not know with any certainty just when Timothy was at Ephesus.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> It is a strong early tradition that the Apostle John was also at Ephesus, but this was likely after Paul had passed from the scene, and possibly also Timothy.

More significant in this passage is the way that it outlines the persons and duties of the eldership of the Ephesian community – and, by extension, all congregations. The three key words are found here in this passage in their usual roles. ‘Elders’ (*presbuteroi*) is the group of men that Paul calls from Ephesus to meet him at the shore in Miletus. This is their ‘title,’ as it were, and it is most unprepossessing title at that. It simply means ‘older man,’ and that generally represents the biological characteristic of ‘elders.’ Elsewhere Paul counsels against putting new converts, or ‘novices,’ into the office, lest they become conceited and “*fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.*”<sup>319</sup> The term *prebuteros* can simply mean an elderly or older man, as it does in I Timothy 5:1 and Titus 2:2; the context determines whether the word indicates the ‘office’ or just the maturity of the person.

These *presbuteroi* were thus called to Paul from Ephesus, and the Apostle exhorts them – knowing of his own departure and manifesting his ongoing concern for the community at Ephesus – “*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*”<sup>320</sup> The word translated ‘overseers’ is *episkopoi*, or ‘bishops.’ The word is a combination of a Greek prefix, *epi*, and the verb ‘to watch’ and thus literally means ‘to watch over, or oversee.’ The use of this word here confirms Paul’s view that the ‘elder’ and the ‘bishop’ were by no means distinct offices in the church, but referred to the same men (again, the words are consistently *plural*). To ‘oversee’ is also the natural vantage point of the *shepherd* whose duty – tending, feeding, and protecting the flock – is the essential duty of all elders: “*to shepherd the church of God.*” Here, as often elsewhere, the Greek word *poimenes* is in verb form (actually, an infinitive): *poimainein*, indicating the primary method by which the elder discharges his duty as an overseer: by *shepherding*.

The metaphor of shepherding is very instructive regarding the duties and responsibilities of the elders. The shepherd, of course, *guards* the flock and protects it

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<sup>319</sup> I Timothy 3:6

<sup>320</sup> Acts 20:28

from predators. But the shepherd is also responsible to feed and nurture the flock, caring for the young and the sick and lame, and leading the sheep to fresh pasture and water. It is not too much to say that the lives of the sheep are entrusted to the shepherds, though often the sheep themselves *belonged* not to the shepherd or shepherds, but to the owner of the flock. It can be seen from the remaining passages that we will review, that the primary means by which the elders perform this shepherding function is through *teaching* and it is no coincidence that the fourth ‘gift’ that Jesus gave to His Church is the *pastor* (or shepherd) and teacher – the *poimenas* and *didaskalous*.

*Teacher* is the operative word with respect to the role and ministry of the elders. In an order of gifts similar to Ephesians 4:11, Paul lists several gifts with seeming priority in I Corinthians 12.

*Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts.* (I Corinthians 12:27-31a)

As all of these gifts operated at the same time in the early church, and especially at Corinth, the ‘*first...second...third...*’ cannot be taken as chronological, at least not strictly so. It may be that they are chronological in terms of the development of the early church from the freshness of the Pentecostal revelation and the witnessing ministry of the apostles to the more settled continuation and expansion of the Church on the basis of that witness. This appears to be what happened historically, with the apostles passing from the scene by the end of the first century, and prophecy all but dying out by the middle of the second century. But the strictly chronological sense of the ordinals does not explain the balance of the list: *miracles, healings, tongues*, which do not have a chronological application to the history of the Church. Also, it would seem that Paul is using these three ordinals to indicate a progression in the revelatory ministry for the building up of the young believing community, a building up that would continue



through the continued ministry of the *third* gift: teachers. This interpretation is strengthened, if not confirmed, by the apostle's words to his legate in Ephesus, Timothy,

*You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*  
(I Timothy 2:1-2)

This passage gives us 'apostolic succession' as Paul conceived it: not the passing of apostolic authority from generation to generation, as Rome has it, but the teaching of apostolic doctrine within the growing and strengthening Church. McGiffert writes, "Thus it came about that it was regarded as their function [*i.e.*, teachers] not to impart fresh truth, but to conserve the truth imparted by others, but inspired apostles, prophets, and teachers of their own and earlier days. And thus it came about that when the line was finally drawn, as it was before the end of the second century, between the apostolic and all subsequent ages, and the apostles, in the narrower sense, were regarded, along with the Old Testament prophets, as the sole recipients of God's revelations, the bishops could be thought of quite naturally, and without any apparent violation of historic fact, as the depositories of the teaching of the apostles, and the authoritative exponents and expounders of apostolic truth."<sup>321</sup>

Thus we conclude that the primary means by which the *presbyters* 'oversee' and 'shepherd' the flock of God is through the teaching ministry, and that this ministry is not revelatory, it is explanatory. Perhaps because these men are not receiving, nor should they seek, direct revelation from God in the manner of the apostle or the prophet, it was consonant with the wisdom of God to establish a *plurality* of elders in each congregation, so that the teaching ministry and its associated authority in the congregation, should not fall into the hands of just one man. Sadly, however, the teaching ministry of the local congregation devolved very quickly – by the end of the second century at the latest – into a singular bishopric, with the other elders left only with the title 'presbyters.' Later, this singular bishop would exert authority beyond one congregation

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<sup>321</sup> McGiffert; 665.

to a 'diocese' of regional congregations 'ruled' by the leading city of that region, and we encounter Bishops of Antioch, of Ephesus, of Smyrna, etc. This process would continue, with each Bishop gathering to himself lesser orders of a new Christian clergy and priesthood, resulting by the fourth century in the rigid hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. McGiffert writes of this historical evolution, "It did not mean the loss of the primitive belief in the presence of the Spirit, and in the special inspiration of certain individuals and their enjoyment of immediate revelations from on high; but it did mean the subjection of spirit to law and of the individual to the institution, and thus foreshadowed the rise of Catholicism."<sup>322</sup>

The Protestant Reformation, however, did little to alleviate this corruption of biblical church government, with most Reformation churches continuing some form of clergy – local, rather than catholic, perhaps – but clergy nonetheless. The Reformed perspective misinterprets I Timothy 5:17 into a division of the eldership between elders who 'rule' and an elder who 'teaches': the Ruling Elder and the Teaching Elder or Pastor, thus establishing what is known as the 'Three-Office View' – Teaching Elder, Ruling Elder, and Deacon. The passage used to defend this perspective, however, merely differentiates between elders who rule well and, by implication, those who do not. Those of the former class are entitled to 'double honor,' which most likely means financial remuneration so that they can devote even more time and energy to the ministry of the Word.

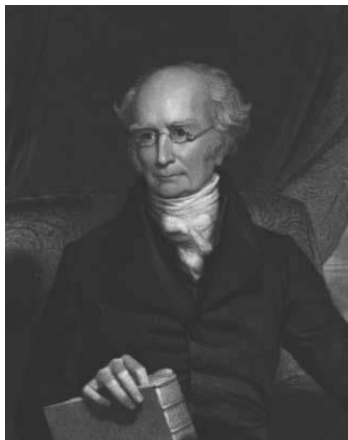
*Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."* (I Timothy 5:17)

It is hard to believe that Paul would accept the principle that there were elders who did not 'rule well' or 'labor in the word and doctrine,' and this verse should be seen rather as an encouragement from the congregation for elders to exert themselves in their ministry of shepherding the flock by teaching. Furthermore, to allocate 'ruling' to

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<sup>322</sup> McGiffert; 671-72.

one group of elders and ‘teaching’ to another (and frequently there is but one man in the second group), is to insinuate a form of ‘ruling’ that is not ‘teaching.’ The New Testament knows of no such rulership within the believing community. There is no authority inherent in the title ‘presbyter’ that exists apart from the teaching of the Word. There is no exercise of authority within the local congregation apart from the ministry of the Word, and even excommunication is to be done according the process outlined, and the spirit enjoined, by Scripture. Too many Presbyterian and Reformed churches have relegated the ‘Ruling Elder’ to an administrative board, where decisions are made regarding church finances, benevolence and missions budgets (though these are often further relegated to committees), and visitation of wayward members of the congregation, while the word and doctrine are the sole responsibility of the ‘Teaching Elder,’ or Pastor.<sup>323</sup>



Samuel Miller (1769-1850)

19<sup>th</sup> Century Presbyterian theologian Samuel Miller takes the Three-Office view as settled policy in his pamphlet *The Ruling Elder*, written by request as an addendum to the *Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church in the United States*. With amazing sleight of hand, Miller consolidates the qualifications of an elder from Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus, leaving out one very significant criterion. Miller writes, “‘An Elder must be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children; one that ruleth well his own house, having children in subjection with all gravity; not accused of riot, or unruly; not self-willed; not soon angry; not given to wine; no striker; not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality; a lover of good men; sober, just, holy, temperate, sound in the faith, in charity, in patience.’ See I Timothy 3 compared with Titus 1:6-8 and 2:2.”<sup>324</sup> In such a thor-

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<sup>323</sup> Further indication of the unbiblical character of this polity is the fact that most Teaching Elders are not members of the congregation at all, but rather members of the Session or Presbytery that has ‘oversight’ of the congregation. Ruling Elders, on the other hand, are members of the local congregation. Such a potentially adversarial relationship among the elders is unheard of in the Pauline letters.

<sup>324</sup> Miller, Samuel *The Ruling Elder* (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications; 1984); 18.

ough compilation of qualifications, can it be a mere accidental oversight (no pun intended) that Miller left out “*apt to teach*”?<sup>325</sup>

Rather than see the gift of teaching as an integral qualification of an elder – indeed, the *sine qua non* of being an elder – Edmund Clowney declares that the presence or lack of that gift is what distinguishes between the Teaching, and merely the Ruling Elder. “In short, then, the gift of teaching distinguishes pastors and teachers from other church elders with whom they share ruling authority in the church.”<sup>326</sup> Strauch, however, recognizes that this false differentiation between elders in the local congregation is nothing less than clericalism, the establishment of another layer of ‘clergy’ – the Pastor – for whom the qualifications have devolved over time to include a certain level of education as well as ordination by the Session/Presbytery. He writes, “As critically important as the teaching and shepherding gifts are to the local church, the New Testament does not elevate those who possess these gifts to a special priestly or clerical status. Nor does it create a distinct office separate from the eldership. Nor does it give to any party exclusive rights to preach, baptize, lead in worship, or administer the Lord’s supper.”<sup>327</sup>

This is not to say that some elders will be more gifted in teaching than others, or, as Paul recognized, some will work harder at it and be deserving of greater compensation. It is merely to say, with Scripture, that such distinctions are all *within* one plurality of elders in the local congregation and do not signify a ‘third office’ above the others. Strauch goes on, “Clericalism does not represent biblical, apostolic Christianity. Indeed, the real error to be contended with is not simply that one man provides the leadership for the congregation, but that one person in the holy brotherhood has been sacralized apart from the brotherhood to an unscriptural status. In practice, the ordained clergyman – the minister, the reverend – is *the Protestant priest*.”<sup>328</sup>

The crux of the matter is that while Paul clearly establishes a form of leadership in the local congregation – the plurality of elders – he does not therefore abandon the

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<sup>325</sup> I Timothy 3:2

<sup>326</sup> Clowney; 212.

<sup>327</sup> Strauch; 211

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*; 113.

charismatic nature of the body of Christ in its local manifestation. The structure or polity of eldership does not constitute a new priesthood, and the extent of the authority of the eldership does not override the divine superintendence of the Holy Spirit, who continues to distribute His gifts to each believer, individually as He wills. Church polity is important to the well-being of the local congregation, especially when we realize that every move toward clericalism or sacerdotalism is a movement away from the charismatic character of the New Covenant Community, the people of God in the New Creation. Schreiner comments, “Too much focus on leaders could obscure the equality of all believers in Christ... Paul maintained a delicate balance between the role of leadership and the contribution of each member in the church. Leaders were important in the Pauline churches, but they did not operate in such a way that individual members’ contributions were quashed; they led mainly by example and persuasion, not by coercion.”<sup>329</sup>

This understanding of the dynamic, charismatic, and orderly nature of a biblical church is most critical in the elders themselves. Strauch writes, “Biblical elders do not want to control a passive congregation. They desire to lead an active, alive, every-member-ministering church.”<sup>330</sup> The presence of an ordered, structured, and biblical government by a plurality of elders must never take the place of, but rather should complement and guide, a dynamic, Spirit-led, even *charismatic* congregation of believers, so that, “*the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*”<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> Schreiner; 385.

<sup>330</sup> Strauch; 30.

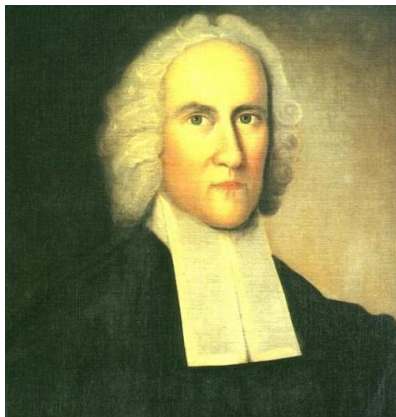
<sup>331</sup> Ephesians 4:16

**Lesson 13 – The *Charismata* (Word)**

**Text: I Corinthians 12 – 14; Romans 12:3-8; I Peter 4:10-11**

*“We have no novel message;  
we need no novel outpouring of the miraculous.”*  
(John Calvin)

In the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century a remarkable revival broke out both in Great Britain and in her American Colonies. In England, Scotland, and Wales as well as up and down the Eastern Seaboard of America, unmistakable marks of divine saving grace were witnessed: increased attendance in church and decreased attendance in taverns and brothels. Peaceable settlement of disputes to the extent that law-courts went idle in many locales. Strengthened marriages, more obedient children, and a general sobriety (both literal and figurative) that did not escape even the notice of unbelievers. But the episode (as it did only last for a few years) was also accompanied by ‘enthusiasms,’ as



Jonathan Edwards (1703-58)

they were generally referred to by those within the church who opposed the ‘work.’ There were reports of unusual and ecstatic behavior in the congregations affected by the event, and many within the established Church on both sides of the Atlantic considered such to be evidence that it was not a work of God. Into this controversy waded America’s premier theologian-philosopher, Jonathan Edwards, whose own sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” is widely credited with being the spark that started the ‘Great Awakening’ in New England. Edwards wrote a treatise on the revival, titled “Thoughts on Revival,” which has become a standard among Reformed thinkers with regard to the topic. In it he acknowledges that ‘strange’ things did occur during the Great Awakening, but that the divine origin of the whole event must not be disallowed even if these ‘enthusiasms’ could themselves be proven false (which he does not allow *a priori*). He writes, “Another foundation-error of those who reject this work, is, their not duly distinguishing the good from the bad, and very unjustly judging of the

whole by a part...The great weakness of the greater part of mankind, in any affair that is new and uncommon, appears in not distinguishing, but either approving or condemning all in the lump."<sup>332</sup> Edwards' point throughout the essay is to show that the divine origin of a work does not preclude both unusual and erroneous manifestations in the work itself. This is not, of course, due to any failing in God who sends His Spirit in revival, but rather to the sinful nature retained even in redeemed men and women. He writes, "Thus far is true, that the influence of the Spirit of God in his *saving* operations will not be an occasion of increasing the corruption of the heart in general; but on the contrary of weakening it: but yet there is nothing unreasonable in supposing that, at the same time that it weakens corruption in general, it may be an occasion of turning what is left into a new channel."<sup>333</sup>

Yet Edwards also refused to agree that all unusual and 'enthusiastic' responses to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit – which he firmly believed the work to be – were in error, and certainly not that they were somehow motivated by the devil, as many of the revival's detractors were saying. While acknowledging 'irregularities,' Edwards nonetheless still assigns the whole to the work of God through His Holy Spirit.

Thus, I think, the errors and irregularities that attend this work may be accounted for, from the consideration of the infirmity and common corruption of mankind, together with the circumstances of the work, though we should suppose it to be a work of God. And it would not be a just objection in any to say, if these powerful impressions and great affections are from the Spirit of God, why does not the same Spirit give strength of understanding and capacity in proportion, to those persons who are the subjects of them; so that strong affections may not, through their error, drive them to an irregular and sinful conduct? I do not know that God has any where obliged himself to do it. The end of the influences of God's Spirit is, to make men spiritually wise to salvation, which is the most excellent wisdom; and he has also appointed means for our gaining such degrees of other knowledge as we need, to conduct ourselves regularly, which means should be carefully used. But the end of the influence of the Spirit of God is not to in-

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<sup>332</sup> Edwards, Jonathan *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Volume One* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust; 1995); 371.

<sup>333</sup> *Idem.*

crease men's natural capacities, nor has God obliged himself immediately to increase civil prudence in proportion to the degrees of spiritual light.<sup>334</sup>

What Edwards is saying here is simply that the Spirit of God does save and guide believers, but that the moving of the Spirit does not immediately eradicate all error within the men and women so moved. Furthermore, and this is an important point that threads through "Thoughts on Revival," the Spirit of God has nowhere obligated himself to follow current social convention, nor to avoid effects that might offend current social sensibilities. In other words, "*The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.*"<sup>335</sup>

Pertinent to our study, Edwards references the church at Corinth in his treatise, which is not surprising considering the 'problems' that church had with the *charismata* – the 'spiritual gifts.' Edwards takes Paul's lead, though, and refuses to condemn the irregularities merely because of an offended sensibility or even what might prove to be erroneous and sinful excess. Edwards argues from the greater to the lesser by noting that things went wrong even in a church among whose guides and teachers were numbered both Peter (Cephas) and Paul. If a church can go astray with infallible guides, and yet still in the main be a believing congregation among which the Spirit of God is moving, how can it be unreasonable that churches guided by lesser lights should also have some problems? This is, however, no indication that the overall work is not from God. In the end, reasons Edwards, the work is to be judged by its effects *in the main* and not *in particular*. By this standard, he concludes, no one can gainsay the Great Awakening as being a genuine work of the divine Spirit. To give one example, "Multitudes in *New England* have lately been brought to a new and great conviction of the truth and certainty of the things of the gospel; to a firm persuasion that Christ Jesus is the Son of God,

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<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*; 373.

<sup>335</sup> John 3:8



and the great and only Saviour of the world.”<sup>336</sup> This is simply another way of quoting Paul, “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>337</sup>

Jonathan Edwards was about a staid and conservative figure as the Church has ever had within its walls – there was nothing flamboyant and irresponsible about him. Yet he was a man of God’s Word, and wanted for the church everything that God had promised her. “I suppose there is scarcely a minister in this land, but from Sabbath to Sabbath is used to pray that God would pour out his Spirit, and work a reformation and revival of religion in the country, and turn us from our intemperance, profaneness, uncleanness, worldliness, and other sins.”<sup>338</sup> In this the Christian pastor is merely following in the footsteps of ancient Moses, who when he was told that there were men in the camp who were prophesying even though they had not come out with Moses and the other elders, responded, “Are you jealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!”<sup>339</sup> We have seen that God promised in Joel 2:28-29 to do just that, and has fulfilled that promise in the outpouring and indwelling of His Holy Spirit at that first ‘Christian’ Pentecost.

All of this is important background to a more thorough exegetical study – though by no means an exhaustive one – of the key passage with regard to the *charismata*: I Corinthians chapters 12, 13, and 14. Were there errors and excesses in Corinth? Certainly, and these were for the most part the occasion of Paul’s first epistle to that assembly. Did this cause the apostle to either doubt the validity of Corinth as a Christian church or to forbid the *charismata* as being too much bother? By no means. Rather he encourages the congregation to “earnestly seek the greater gifts” (12:31) and to “desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues.” (14:39) It remains as it did in Paul’s day and in Jonathan Edwards’ day, that we must not ‘throw the baby out with the bathwater’ in our consideration of the *charismata* of the Holy Spirit in the life of the congregation, but rather “to judge with sound judgment.” This is exactly what Paul himself

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<sup>336</sup> Edwards; 375.

<sup>337</sup> I Corinthians 12:3

<sup>338</sup> Edwards; 375.

<sup>339</sup> Numbers 11:29

wanted for the Corinthian (and all) believers, as he states in the opening remarks of this particular section of his letter.

*Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.* (I Corinthians 12:1-3)

“I do not want you to be ignorant...therefore I make known to you.” The words ‘ignorant’ and ‘make known’ are cognates of the same verb, *ginōskō*, ‘I know.’ Literally the apostle tells the church at Corinth that ‘I make known to you so that you are not ‘not knowing.’ The topic is, however, not what is now termed ‘spiritual gifts,’ but rather *spirituals* – possible *spiritual* men or *spiritual* things, as the word *pneumatikōn* is both masculine and neuter in form. Based on its usage throughout the three chapters, the best translation here is probably *spiritual things*, meaning the *charisma* – or grace-gifts – distributed by the Holy Spirit to each member of the church (12:11). It is important to note that the apostle does not begin with *spirituals* specifically from the Holy Spirit, but immediately presents a qualification and a judgment *between spirituals*.

In these opening words, Paul juxtaposes two possible manifestations of *spirituals* – one valid and one entirely invalid. Scholars have struggled with both the meaning of verses 2 & 3 and their position here at the beginning of a long treatise on the *charismata*. Why does Paul mention “calling Jesus accursed”? Did anyone at Corinth actually do that? That seems unlikely, for such a phenomenon would incur far more than this passing statement from Paul. It is rather more likely that these former pagans (12:2) were very familiar with ecstatic utterances as part of the pagan worship ceremony/ritual, within which might have been the utterance of curses upon other deities, including the Christian Jesus.<sup>340</sup> C. K. Barrett comments, “Paul assumes the existence of a community in which the phenomena of inspiration were present, and indeed common. He neither denies the right of such phenomena to exist within the church, nor affirms that in themselves they are a proof of the presence and activity of the Spirit of God. That is, Chris-

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<sup>340</sup> One can envision such an occurrence in Ephesus, where the preaching of Jesus created an uproar among the adherents of Artemis, the goddess of the city (*cp.* Acts 19:28).

tian ‘enthusiasm’ is neither attacked nor defended, but presupposed and analysed.”<sup>341</sup> This interpretation accords well with the other comments we find in Paul’s letter to the Corinthian church concerning the members’ prior and ongoing association with pagan cultic activities, including meat sacrificed to idols and pagan feasts. It was apparently the case that the Corinthians church, perhaps to a greater degree than the other Pauline churches, was already deeply experienced in the ecstatic nature of some pagan rituals, and the danger was therefore great that the young believers might not have the wisdom to discern between the pagan spirits (demons) and the Spirit of God.

It is also possible, though perhaps a bit anachronistic at this point, that the apostle is referring to the later common practice of the Roman magistrates to require arrested Christians to both acknowledge the deity of the Emperor and to *curse Jesus* as the grounds of their acquittal. Pliny the Younger, a Roman governor during the reign of Emperor Trajan, notes in one of his letters to the Emperor,

For I do not doubt that, whatever the character of the crime may be which they confess, their pertinacity and inflexible obstinacy certainly ought to be punished. There were others who showed similar mad folly whom I reserved to be sent to Rome, as they were Roman citizens. Subsequently, as is usually the way, the very fact of my taking up this question led to a great increase of accusations, and a variety of cases were brought before me. A pamphlet was issued anonymously, containing the names of a number of people. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians and called upon the gods in the usual formula, reciting the words after me, those who offered incense and wine before your image, which I had given orders to be brought forward for this purpose, together with the statues of the deities – all such I considered should be discharged, **especially as they cursed the name of Christ**, which, it is said, those who are really Christians cannot be induced to do.<sup>342</sup>

As Trajan reigned from AD 98 – 117, this letter was written many decades after Paul’s epistle and so might not reflect the situation in Corinth at the time of Paul’s writing. Thus it may be the better interpretation to consider that the apostle was both well

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<sup>341</sup> Barrett, *I Corinthians*; 279.

<sup>342</sup> [Pliny's Letter To Trajan About Christians \(earlychurchhistory.org\)](http://www.earlychurchhistory.org). Accessed 06November2022.

aware, and justifiably concerned, regarding the Corinthian believers' prior life in paganism, and what they had 'learned' in that life regarding *spirituals*.

This is essentially how Paul himself regards these former pagans, noting in verse 2 how there were *once led astray* both by and to dumb idols. Paul refuses to admit any validity to pagan idols while at the same time acknowledging the evil spirits that lie behind them. In this the apostle is laying an important part of the foundation of his treatise: that spirits do lead, and not always in the right direction. There is at least one infallible criteria between the false and the true, and that is in regard to the Person of Jesus Christ: *He is Lord*, and no spirit other than the Spirit of God is going to acknowledge that fact, "*no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit.*" The objection that anyone can mouth the words, 'Jesus is Lord,' is pedantic; clearly Paul is not referring to merely saying the words of the sentence, but rather to acknowledging the truth of them. The phrase stands in opposition to the false and pagan statement, 'Jesus is accursed,' and thus reflect both the attitude of the speaker's heart and the spirit by which he or she is led. Fee writes, "The use of 'Lord' in such a context meant absolute allegiance to Jesus as one's deity and set believers apart from both Jews, for whom such a confession was blasphemy, and pagans, especially those in the cults, where the deities were called 'lords.'"<sup>343</sup> Here Paul is establishing the benchmark: the fact of spiritual utterances does not in itself prove the presence or activity of the Holy Spirit of God; there are other spirits and, along with the Apostle John, Paul would have believers "*test the spirits.*" Again, Fee, "The presence of the Spirit in power and gifts makes it easy for God's people to consider the power and gifts the real evidence of Spirit's presence. Not so for Paul. The ultimate criterion of the Spirit's activity is the exaltation of Jesus as Lord. Whatever takes away from that, even if they be legitimate expressions of the Spirit, begins to move away from Christ to a more pagan fascination with spiritual activity as an end in itself."<sup>344</sup> This points out a common problem both in modern charismatic and Pentecos-

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<sup>343</sup> Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*; 157.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*; 157-58.

tal churches, and in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Corinth. But the problem, once again, is not with the *charismata*.

Thus we have encountered two touchstones with regard to validating the movement and guidance of the Holy Spirit within the church and in the midst of the *charismata*. The first has been noted earlier and will be reiterated later: *it must be for the edification of the body* and not for the aggrandizement of the individual, no matter how valid the ‘gift.’ The second criterion is really first in priority: *it must exalt the Name and Person of Jesus Christ as Lord*, for, as Jesus Himself had promised, the Spirit whom He was to send would not draw attention or glory to Himself, but would reflect the glory of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. “The true Christian watchword is, *Jesus is Lord*...It is true not because it is the right or orthodox formula but because it expresses the proper relation with Jesus: the speaker accepts his authority, and proclaims himself the servant of him whom he confesses as Lord.”<sup>345</sup>

Thus in these opening verses of chapter 12, the apostle shows his readers that he is aware of their prior experience, that they were acquainted with ‘spiritual things’ from their pagan days and thus considered themselves to be very ‘spiritual’ themselves. But the nature of the Holy Spirit’s *charismata* is totally different from that of the pagan demons and the ecstasies of the pagan cult ritual. “*What fellowship has Christ with Belial?*”<sup>346</sup> Paul probably considers the Corinthians to be at least a little *ignorant* and seeks earnestly to educate them both in the nature of the true *charismata* and in their purpose. Note how the apostle brackets this entire discussion – from chapter 12 through chapter 14 – in the closing section of the latter chapter:

*If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.*

(I Corinthians 14:37-38)

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<sup>345</sup> Barrett; 281. It is amazing and disturbing that there are those today within American evangelicalism, who teach that ‘accepting Jesus as Lord’ is optional for the true believer. One cannot imagine Paul failing to pronounce an *anathema* upon such heresy.

<sup>346</sup> II Corinthians 6:15

The problem in Corinth, then, is *ignorance*, and not the *charismata*. The same could be said of many churches today, both charismatic and conservative. But neither Paul nor the Holy Spirit wishes for God’s children to remain ignorant. What follows, therefore, is the most comprehensive teaching on the *charismata* – their nature, their form, and their purpose – to be found in the entire New Testament.

*There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.*

(I Corinthians 12:4-11)

For some reason the New King James translators decided to translate the middle set of *charismata* with a different distinctive word: *differences*. The same word is found in each of the first three clauses, the word *diaireseis* – ‘diversities’ or ‘varieties.’ Gordon Fee offers the following diagram of Paul’s trinitarian outline of the work of the Spirit in the Church:

DIVERSITIES of gifts	there are	but the <i>same Spirit</i>
DIVERSITIES of services	there are	but the <i>same Lord</i>
DIVERSITIES of workings	there are	but the <i>same God</i>
		Who works <i>all things</i> in <i>all people</i>

The three things of which there are a diversity are probably somewhat synonymous in Paul’s thinking. At least they are complementary and not entirely distinct from one another. ‘Gifts’ is *charismata*; ‘services’ is *diakoniōn* – a familiar word known to believers as ‘deacon’; and ‘workings’ is *energaimatōn*, the Greek root from which we get our English word ‘energy.’ The subsequent discussion and description of the *charismata* provides no foundation for seeing these three words in any other manner than as roughly synonymous – the use of three different words having more of a literary flair

than an exegetical significance. If there is a difference, Paul does not elaborate on it and it appears not to be important to the gist of his instruction. What is important for the apostle is that (1) there are *different* gifts within the body; (2) it is the Holy Spirit who determines which gifts are given to which members; and (3) the end goal in all of this is the *building up*, the *edification*, of the body.

Modern conservative scholars tend not to dispute that every member of the body of Christ has a *charismata*, and perhaps several. There is, of course, the debate as to whether some of the gifts have passed and are no longer operative in the church, and we will investigate that issue below. The question to deal with here is the *where* of these gifts – in what venue are the *charismata* to be operative? John MacArthur, in his book *Body Dynamics*, acknowledges the ‘spiritual gifts’ as necessary to the life of the local congregation (though he does believe some of the gifts have ceased), but it is clear that, to MacArthur, the supreme gift in terms of the worship service is that of *teaching*. He writes, “God has given each member certain spiritual gifts...for the work of the ministry. These spiritual gifts can be exercised in many ways: visiting the sick and shut-ins, counseling new Christians, praying and studying the Bible with others, taking food, clothing, and money to people in special need, showing personal love and care for the lonely and discouraged, reaching out to neighbors and friends with the Gospel.”<sup>347</sup> This is the general consensus among conservative evangelicals with regard to ‘spiritual gifts’ – they are the way the Holy Spirit uses the laity in ministry: outside of the worship service.



John MacArthur (b. 1939)

MacArthur places the entire service of the Christian assembly – the Sunday service as well as any other ‘official’ meetings of the church – under the responsibility and ‘gift’ of the pastor-teacher. Reminiscent of the ‘clerical comma’ in Ephesians 4:12, MacArthur assigns the pastor-teacher the role of Christ’s agents and instruments in building His church.

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<sup>347</sup> MacArthur, John *Body Dynamics* (Wheaton: Victor Books; 1982); 94.

The office of pastor-teacher is one, not two. The idea is a teaching shepherd. He stays in one place, teaching the Gospel and sound doctrine, while at the same time pastoring the sheep. He takes over when the evangelist leaves. His task is to feed and lead the Church. The teaching shepherd's main task is to protect the flock. That's what shepherding is – protecting from both dangerous places and enemies. The pastor-teacher does this by building safeguards, teaching the truth, and helping those who may be stumbling into sin. He not only preserves them, but strengthens and encourages them. Jesus, of course, is the chief Shepherd. He loves His Flock. He builds His Church. He does so by providing the Body with gifted men – evangelists and pastor-teachers.<sup>348</sup>

Although MacArthur is clearly alluding to Ephesians 4, he is neglecting the key passage with regard to the growth – the 'building up' – of the body of Christ.

*...but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*  
(Ephesians 4:15-16)

This 'building up' is the same 'edification' of which Paul speaks in I Corinthians, "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all."<sup>349</sup> The *charismata*, therefore, are not primarily benevolent or evangelistic; they are structural for the building up of the local congregation in the knowledge of God through the gifting of the Holy Spirit.



Sinclair Ferguson (b. 1948)

The operation of the *charismata* is intended for the benefit of the believing community and, while there is importance in the congregation's care of the sick and shut-ins, the primary purpose of the 'spiritual gifts' is to the body itself, as *every part does its share, causing the growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.* The pastor-teachers equip the church through teaching and protect the church through shepherding, but the church itself cannot grow as Christ's intends for it

to grow on the ministry and giftedness of the pastor-teachers alone. Sinclair Ferguson

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*; 89. It should be noted that MacArthur does not agree with the 'clerical comma' (p. 97). He does, however, seem to think that the venue of all other gifts beside that of the pastor-teacher, is outside the worship service.

<sup>349</sup> I Corinthians 12:7



writes of the spiritual gifts, “They are given through the Spirit of Christ to equip believers to serve one another in the body of Christ and thus to set on display the unity of the church in the context of its diversity, and vice versa.”<sup>350</sup> He goes on to note how the developed, clerical nature of the church was not what Paul intended; at least it is not what the apostle both recognized and encouraged in the churches under his apostolic care.

What is noteworthy, however, in view of the way the later church would develop a narrow and centralized concept of ministry, is the relatively subtle distinctions between some of these gifts exercised presumably by different people: wisdom is distinguished from knowledge, teaching is distinguished from exhortation. Body-wide giftedness was anticipated, and room for its exercise taken for granted. Manifestations of the Spirit for the common good (I Cor. 12:7) in word-ministries were widespread among the people of God. Ministry in the New Testament is always, in the most fundamental sense, charismatic.<sup>351</sup>

Richard Gaffin adds, “Biblically speaking, ‘charismatic’ and ‘Christian’ are synonymous. The Christian life in its totality is (to be) a charismatic life. Christ’s church as a *whole* is the charismatic movement...From beginning to end gifts are given for service in the church. There are no exceptions to this consideration.”<sup>352</sup> But the challenge to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century church is just *how* this charismatic nature of the church is to be realized. Are we to agree with the modern charismatic movement, that



Richard Gaffin (b. 1936)

every *charisma* we read of in the New Testament is operative today? Are we quenching the Holy Spirit if we maintain that at least some of the ‘gifts’ have passed from the scene and are no longer functioning – nor meant to function – in the church of the post-apostolic era? There is little agreement on these issues, but there are some lines of thought that do flow from the New Testament, and especially the Pauline letters, that indicate a path forward to an answer.

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<sup>350</sup> Ferguson, Sinclair *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1996); 209.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*; 211.

<sup>352</sup> Gaffin, Richard B. *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company; 1979); 48-49.

Broadly speaking, we may categorize the ‘gifts’ into two ministry emphases within the church: *speaking* gifts and *servicing* gifts. For this general delineation we go to the only passage in Peter’s letters in which that apostle speaks of the gifts operating in the body of Christ. Very briefly stated, yet very comprehensive in scope:

*As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.* (I Peter 4:10-11)

The word translated here as ‘ministers’ is, again, the common *diakonei*, ‘to serve.’ Speaking and serving, therefore, are Peter’s two general categories of gifts in the church. This is not to say that those who speak cannot serve, or that those who serve cannot speak. Rather it is to show the two broad categories of the *charisma* (the term Peter uses in verse 10) in the overall edification of the body. In summarizing the diverse and varied ‘lists’ of spiritual gifts in the Pauline letters, Gaffin writes, “The apparently random character of the lists should not keep us from recognizing that each of the gifts belongs to one of two basic categories: *word-charisma* and *deed-charisma*.”<sup>353</sup> At the ‘head’ of each category of gifts we also find an ‘office’ in the local body: *elders* for the *word-charisma* and *deacons* for the *deed-charisma*. On the face of it, therefore, it would appear that the *charisma* remain in force so long as both word and deed gifts are needed in the church.

However, it is necessary to consider a further differentiation within the *word-charisma*, one that Paul speaks of in an indirect manner in I Corinthians 12 – 14. This distinction is between *revelatory* and *didactic*, between a word that comes by direct revelation and one that comes by way of study and preparation. In the revelatory category we have prophesy, words of knowledge and wisdom, tongues and their interpretation. Indeed, it would seem that, to Paul, an interpreted tongue was roughly equivalent to a prophecy, while an uninterpreted tongue was not to be uttered in the congregation.<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*; 52.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*; 57.

Ferguson writes, “When interpreted, therefore, tongues-speaking is the functional equivalent of prophecy and is revelatory in nature.”<sup>355</sup> The common denominator of these *word-charisma* is their source or origin as direct from God through the Holy Spirit. Gaffin comments on the gift of tongues, “What Paul says about tongues-speaking shows its fully inspired origin in the sense that the words of the speaker are the words of the Holy Spirit. His speech capacities are so taken over by the Spirit that the words spoken are not his, except in the sense that his voice is employed. Involved is a form of inspiration that even ‘goes beyond’ the full, comprehending utilization of the human subject that is usually the case in the high inspiration of the biblical writers.”<sup>356</sup> There is control here, to be sure, for just as “*the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets,*” so also the tongue speaker can refrain from speaking if he senses (somehow?) that there is no interpretation. But the nature of this set of *charismata* is direct and revelatory in a manner that other word-gifts are not. “The origin and content of tongues shows that for tongues, as well as prophecy, a revelatory aspect is at the core of the gift and inseparable from it.”<sup>357</sup>

In the latter, didactic, category of giftedness we have the *preaching* and *teaching* ministry of the church. It is an exegetical error committed by a majority of conservative



Wayne Grudem (b. 1948)

evangelical scholars to equate *prophesying* with *preaching* as the latter succeeding the former in the church. MacArthur is an example of this viewpoint, which has no foundation in the biblical text, “The gift of prophecy means preaching, not foretelling. It means ‘to tell forth, to declare.’”<sup>358</sup> Such a definition of prophesying would have been foreign to the 1<sup>st</sup> Century church, whether Jew or Gentile in heritage. The

revelatory and inspired nature of prophecy was uncontested, even though the individual prophecies were to be examined and judged (*cp.* I Cor. 14:19). Wayne Grudem more

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<sup>355</sup> Ferguson; 230.

<sup>356</sup> Gaffin; 78.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*; 80-81.

<sup>358</sup> MacArthur; 109.

accurately highlights this revelatory character of prophecy in his summary of how things apparently took place in the Pauline churches. “The thought that occurs to a prophet is pictured as coming *quite spontaneously*, for it comes while the first speaker is talking. So this prophecy does not seem to be a sermon or lesson which had been prepared beforehand; it comes rather at the prompting of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>359</sup>

Why would such gifts be needed in the local congregation, and are they still needed today? One’s answer to the first half of the question often determines one’s answer to the second. The conservative answer to the first part would be to say that revelation and revelatory gifts are required when the information needed by the church is incomplete as it stands. God provides direct instruction because written instruction is lacking. This could take the form of doctrinal formulations or personal or corporate admonitions and warnings. Agabus, for instance, was a recognized prophet within the early church, but we need not assume that he only prophesied imprisonment for apostles and famines. Paul himself indicates that the revelatory nature of at least two of the gifts – apostles and prophets – was *foundational* to the church.

*Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*  
(Ephesians 2:19-22)

It was once conventional wisdom to see ‘prophets’ in this passage as referring to the Old Testament prophets. But that would indeed be a strange way for Paul to use the term in this passage, in light of what he means by ‘prophet’ everywhere else. Furthermore, such an interpretation would require reversing the order of the terms, whereas understanding ‘prophets’ to refer to the New Testament *charisma* keeps the order of apostles and prophets found everywhere else in Paul’s writings. Consider both the order and the revelatory nature of these two *charismata* in Ephesians 3,

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<sup>359</sup> Grudem, Wayne *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton: Crossway Books; 1988); 116.

*For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles – if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been **revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets**: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.* (Ephesians 3:1-7)

It would seem, then, that the apostle considered the *word*-charisma of the apostle and the prophet to both be revelatory and foundational. But a foundation is only laid once for any building and afterward the structure is built on it. Thus one would *a priori* expect the revelatory *word*-charisma to give way to the didactic *word*-charisma at some point in time, once the foundation has been laid. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that, since one of the parts of the foundation is the *apostles*, their passing would indicate the completion of the foundation according to the sovereign will and providence of God. Along with the cessation of revelatory *charismata* one would also expect the ‘signs of an apostle’ also to cease with the departure of the apostles from the scene (*cp.* II Cor. 12:12).

Ferguson points out a consistent feature in biblical revelation, that the manifestation of miraculous and remarkable occurrences are not only rare in the biblical history, but are overwhelmingly – though not exclusively – limited to three periods in that history: the time of Moses and Joshua, the time of Elijah and Elisha, and the time of Jesus and His Apostles. Ferguson writes,

In fact, in the Scriptures themselves, extraordinary gifts appear to be limited to a few brief periods in biblical history, in which they serve as confirmatory signs of new revelation and its ambassadors, and as a means of establishing and defending the kingdom of God in epochally significant ways...Outbreaks of the miraculous sign-gifts in the Old Testament were, generally speaking, limited to those periods of redemptive history in which a new stage of covenantal revelation was reached and during which the kingdom of God required special defence [*sic*] against the danger of annihilation by the powers of darkness: the days of the Exodus, the entry into the promised land, and the establish-

ment of the people there; the time of Elijah and Elisha and the establishing of the prophetic ministry.<sup>360</sup>

This analysis would correspond well with the historical reality that the more revelatory and miraculous among the gifts did indeed fade from the life of the church during the late 1<sup>st</sup> and into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century. To be sure, both apostles and prophets continued to be operative in the church in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, though an interesting note in the *Didache* does seem to indicate that these *charismata* were somewhat diminished from their 1<sup>st</sup> Century glory, and a distinction was often made between the traveling apostles and prophets in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century and the foundational representatives of those *charismata* in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century.

Now about the apostles and prophets: Act in line with the gospel precept. Welcome every apostle on arriving, as if he were the Lord. But he must not stay beyond one day. In case of necessity, however, the next day too. If he stays three days, he is a false prophet. On departing, an apostle must not accept anything save sufficient food to carry him till his next lodging. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet.<sup>361</sup>

One cannot imagine this being written of the foundational apostles and prophets of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century and of Pauls' letters. By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century there was no more mention of prophets, tongues, miracles, etc. in the church. This era does coincide with an increase in structural hierarchy within the church with the rise of the episcopacy through the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, and modern charismatics argue that it was this increased formalism that choked out and 'quenched' the Holy Spirit. Thus Ferguson posits the question, "Did increased formalism (even in a non-pejorative sense) destroy spirituality and faith?"<sup>362</sup> While it may be reasonably argued that increased formalism and hierarchical structure in the churches *did* decrease spirituality and the participation of every believer in the liturgy of the assembly, this in itself does not mean that the revelatory *charismata* were intended to continue. The issue is not the *charismata* themselves; the issue is the church's need for on-going revelation. In reference to the 'signs of an apostle,' Clowney

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<sup>360</sup> Ferguson; 224.

<sup>361</sup> *The Didache*; Cyril Richardson; 176.

<sup>362</sup> Ferguson; 222.

writes, “Miracles, then, have meaning, attesting Christ’s finished work and the apostolic foundation of the church. Apostolic miracles sealed the final revelation given in Christ, preserved for us in New Testament Scripture.”<sup>363</sup>

The burden of proof for continuation (or restoration) of the revelatory *charismata* lies with the continuationist, for he must show that the local church still has need of direct revelation from God. With the development of the New Testament canon, this need for on-going direct revelation is rendered unnecessary and even dangerous, for the charismatic must acknowledge that his or her revelatory *charisma* is, in fact, *revelation* from God and thus stands on par with Scripture. This situation differs only in form from the Roman Catholic elevation of Tradition to an authority equal with Scripture. Gaffin therefore concludes, “Since the history of redemption has been *definitively accomplished* and since after Pentecost its ongoing movement is delayed until Christ’s return for the *application* of redemption and the ingathering of the nations to share in the salvation of the covenant, the basis and rationale for new revelation is lacking and revelation has therefore ceased.”<sup>364</sup> That this cessation of the revelatory *charismata* was intended by the Holy Spirit is indicated both the by foundational character of the apostles and prophets as well as by several passages in the New Testament that indicate a shift from direct revelation to the transmission of sound doctrine from one generation to the next. Indeed, it appears that this transmission of doctrine was already taking place during the time of the apostles.

*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.* (II Timothy 2:2)

*If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.* (I Timothy 4:6)

*Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the elder-*

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<sup>363</sup> Clowney; 243.

<sup>364</sup> Gaffin; 98.

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*ship. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.* (I Timothy 4:13-16)

*Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?* (Hebrews 2:1-4)

This last quote from Hebrews is significant in that it ties the *signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit* as attestations of the veracity of the report *confirmed to us by those who first heard Him*. The author claims no such attesting wonders to his own teaching, and thus indicates that these phenomena were unique to the *revelatory* phase, if we may so put it, of the 'Christian' advent. It is not doing damage to the text to see that such attesting signs were either already diminishing when the letter to the Hebrews was written, or were not expected to continue as commonplace among the 'second generation' of the Church.

The passage most often referred to with regard to the cessation of the *charismata* is, of course, in I Corinthians 13.

*Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.* (I Corinthians 13:8-12)

Conservative interpretation of this passage has linked *the perfect* that is to come with the New Testament Scriptures, but this does not answer to what the apostle says in this text. Logically, we understand that when *the perfect comes* the result will be that *I shall know just as I also am known*. This state of perfect knowledge has not come with the canon of the New Testament, and we still *see in a mirror dimly*. Commenting on these



verses, Gaffin writes, “The view that they describe the point at which the New Testament canon is completed cannot be made credible exegetically. While this view rests on the correct insight that prophecy and tongues are tied to the foundational, canon-forming period of the church’s history, it strains Paul’s statements by reading into them considerations that are outside his scope here.”<sup>365</sup>

Furthermore, the context shows us that Paul is not really talking about the cessation of any of the *charismata* – and will, in the next chapter, encourage believers in Corinth both to speak in tongues and to desire prophecy. Since ‘the perfect’ cannot be the New Testament Scriptures, the only point in the calendar that would correspond is therefore Christ’s Second Coming, the *Parousia*. But this would seem to indicate that the revelatory gifts will also continue until that time. “After all else has been said, this passage appears to be the immovable stumbling block for the view that these gifts have ceased.”<sup>366</sup> But the entire chapter is a lead-in to Chapter 14, where we find the criterion by which all operations of the *charismata* are to be judged is that of edification of the body, not personal aggrandizement or even personal sanctification. What he is doing in Chapter 13 is *showing a still more excellent way* (12:31): love. It is enough to say that these *charismata* will someday pass away – though we must note that the apostle also lists ‘knowledge’ along with prophecy and tongues – we need not attempt to find the schedule of this passing in Paul’s words. “Paul is not intending to specify the time when any particular mode will cease. What he does affirm is the termination of the believer’s present, fragmentary knowledge, based on likewise temporary modes of revelation, when ‘the perfect’ comes. The time of the cessation of prophecy and tongues is an open question so far as this passage is concerned and will have to be decided on the basis of other passages and considerations.”<sup>367</sup> Those ‘other passages and considerations’ have been summarized above: the church’s need for on-going, direct divine revelation has intentionally passed from the scene; the current recourse of all believers is to the Scriptures now completed by the apostolic witness.

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<sup>365</sup> Gaffin; 109.

<sup>366</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*; 111.

For those who still wish to ‘recover’ the *charismata* there remains an insurmountable obstacle: we really do not know exactly what these were in the form in which they were experienced in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Corinth. The difference between a ‘word of knowledge’ and a ‘word of wisdom’ has never satisfactorily been shown. The nature of ‘tongues,’ or ‘glossolalia,’ is also a mystery. Were tongues the *language of angels* or were they foreign languages? Modern anthropological studies of charismatic tongues-speaking has shown fairly definitively that in spite of the words being non-sensical, the phonemes used are uniformly that of the native language of the tongues-speaker. This is a telling observation, for it indicates that the ‘tongues’ being spoken are really the same ‘language’ structure as the speaker’s native tongue, and therefore perhaps not so miraculous as is commonly thought. “The nature of glossolalia in Corinth is important because it is well established that contemporary tongue-speaking does not have linguistic structure, and that the phonemes used in it are the phonemes to which the speaker is accustomed in the language or languages already known.”<sup>368</sup>

Finally, the modern claim that tongues constitute a ‘personal prayer language’ has very little basis in the Pauline writings. Only two passages may be even remotely interpreted in this way, and one of them really has nothing to do with ‘tongues’ at all. In Romans 8, Paul is speaking of the blessing of the indwelling Holy Spirit in every believer, and the role of the Spirit in interceding for the believer when the believer himself *does not know what to pray*.

*Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*  
(Romans 8:26)

In spite of modern, charismatic exegesis, the apostle cannot be referring here to tongues as a ‘personal prayer language’ for the simple reason that the intercession of the Spirit of which Paul speaks *cannot be uttered*. Yet Paul does speak of himself praying in tongues, in I Corinthians 14,

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<sup>368</sup> Clowney; 247.

*For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.* (I Corinthians 14:14-15)

The text is quite clear in terms of the relationship between prayer and tongues, but the context is just as clear that Paul is still within the venue of the assembly and not in his private 'prayer closet.' The attempt by restorationists or continuationists to redefine the role of the *charismata* is illegitimate. If the gifts delineated in I Corinthians were meant to continue (in which case, they were also meant to be restored, since they did not continue historically), then it must be concluded that they were meant to continue in the form and for the purpose they held in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. This is *revelation*, plain and simple. "Despite disclaimers, the issue at stake here is the sufficiency of Scripture for the directing of the church and the individual."<sup>369</sup> It is on this basis that the *word-charisma* must be judged as to their role in the church today. Given the uncertainties regarding correspondence between revelatory gifts today and those operative in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, and given the biblical certainty that such *charismata* as tongues & interpretation, prophecy, and even words of wisdom and of knowledge were indeed *revelatory*, their continuation (or restoration) in the church today could only diminish the objective importance of the Scriptures. Thus we conclude that the *word-charisma* of preaching and teaching, with exhortation perhaps as well, are the on-going and settled form of transmission of sound doctrine from generation to generation. These are no less *charismata* than the more miraculous and more direct gifts of prophecy, tongues, etc. and are no less needed in the church today than they were two thousand years ago.

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<sup>369</sup> Ferguson; 231.

**Lesson 14 – The *Charismata* (Deed)**

**Text: Acts 6:1-8; I Corinthians 12:18-25; Romans 12:4-8**

*“Indeed, placing unqualified and unfit people into the church’s leadership structure is a crucial part of Satan’s ongoing strategy for corrupting churches.”*  
(Alexander Strauch)

The German phrase *Sitz im Leben* is often used in philosophical and theological treatises to indicate the ‘setting in life’ that provides the necessary context for understanding any practice or doctrine. There are few practical doctrines taught in the Bible for which the *Sitz im Leben* is more important than that of the *deed-charismata*, and especially of the office of Deacon in the church. This is not to say that the biblical teaching is culturally conditioned and can therefore be disregarded. It is, however, to say that the modern (21<sup>st</sup> Century) *Sitz im Leben* of most churches is so vastly different from that of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century church as to be beyond comparison. This, too, is not necessarily a good thing, though we may accept it as divine providence. Whenever the current setting-in-life, in any age of the Church, has been recognized to be so divergent from the biblical one as to make interpretation and application of biblical teaching almost impossible, there have been resultant movements in the Church to *return* to the 1<sup>st</sup> Century *Sitz im Leben*. They have all failed, though we often honor the attempts in our subsequent histories. Examples of such restorationist movements include the Waldensians of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, the Moravian Brethren in the days of the Reformation, and the Amish and Mennonite communities of today.

For these groups, a key component of the life of the Church is the biblical admonition from God to His people: *“Come out from among them and be separate.”* Indeed, it is on the basis – some might say, prerequisite – of this command that God responds, *“and you will be My people and I will be your God.”* That this admonition still stands for the New Testament Church is confirmed in II Corinthians 6, where Paul quotes it from the Old Testament and applies it to the Corinthian church.

## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

*Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord.  
Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.  
I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,  
Says the LORD Almighty.”*

(II Corinthians 6:17-18)

This exhortation never meant that the people of God were to isolate themselves from the world, nor that believers are intended to join monasteries, convents, or cloisters. The fact that God providentially placed Israel right in the midst of the most highly traveled corridor in the Ancient Near East seems to speak strongly against such a notion. It was rather the case that the life of God's people – separated, yet in the very presence of the heathen – was to be a powerful testimony to the wisdom, power, and grace of Israel's God.

*Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'*

(Deuteronomy 4:5-6)

This is one of the reasons why conscious attempts to separate from the world and become an isolated 'Christian' community have never worked: they deny one of the primary, if not *the* primary, purpose of God for leaving the Church in the world, its *witness*. Still, the opposite extreme of embracing and assimilating to the world has also failed miserably. When the Church becomes like the world in almost every respect, there is nothing to witness *to*, there is no moral gradient for the world to observe; all is lost. Historically, this assimilating trend has been far more powerful than the isolating one, and convents and cloisters have always been very few and far between. For the most part, professing believers have assigned the 'spiritual' tasks of their faith to the clergy and have thus gone about their daily lives with little or no impact visible on account of their professed faith. Because of this prevailing tendency, the leadership of the churches has become more and more worldly, and the leadership selected increasingly on the basis of 'success' in the world. "The church should be run like a business," is an oft-repeated (and off-base) remark in modern evangelicalism. Strauch's comment is cor-

rect and appropriate, “placing unqualified and unfit people into the church’s leadership structure is a crucial part of Satan’s ongoing strategy for corrupting churches.”<sup>370</sup>

It has been the case throughout history, and certainly when the Church was first founded, that isolation from the prevailing culture was more forced than voluntary. It is still the case in many countries – especially Muslim countries – that a person converting to Christianity will be isolated, ostracized, (and often killed) by their family and community. In the earliest years of the Church, Jewish converts to Christianity were ‘ex-synagogued’ – put out of the synagogue like the man whom Jesus healed of congenital blindness. In the ancient world, and certainly in Second Temple Israel, this meant something much more dire than ‘excommunication’ means today. It meant loss of family, loss of job, loss of the wherewithal to survive. One was not merely thrown out of one synagogue in order to attend the one down the street; no, one was completely cast adrift and, for all intents and purposes, hopeless. If the community of one’s new faith did not step in to provide both the social and economic structure necessary for life, the new convert would starve. “Their life was emphatically social. Their unity was a unity, not of mechanical arrangement, but of life – not of artificial restraint, but of spontaneous sympathy and love.”<sup>371</sup> This was the *Sitz im Leben* of the early church; this was the setting-in-life of the first diaconate.

This is not the world in which we live today. Western welfare systems now carry the vast majority of the ‘benevolence’ load required by the indigent and poor. So many different churches and denominations today means that being put out of one church is hardly a great burden or loss of economic or social standing. Indeed, Christianity is so marginalized in modern, Western culture that someone who converts from neo-paganism to Christianity is generally mocked and belittled, but not thrown out of his family or place of work. Church benevolence funds are no longer for the needy *within* the assembly; they have become social programs for society’s poor in the hope that such benevolence might lead to their salvation. This is not to pass judgment (yet) on the cur-

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<sup>370</sup> Strauch, Alexander *Ministry of Mercy: The New Testament Deacon* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth Publishers; 2007); 84.

<sup>371</sup> Burns, *The First Three Christian Centuries*; 54.

rent situation; it is merely to highlight the fact that it is a completely different *Sitz im Leben* than we find, say, in Acts 6.

### The First Diaconate?

*Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.* (Acts 6:1-7)

This passage is generally viewed as the beginning of the 'diaconate' in the Jerusalem church, an interesting fact considering that the word 'deacon' is actually not found in the passage. The assignation of 'diaconate' to these seven is due entirely to the nature of their ministry: *waiting on tables*. Regardless of the words used, however, it is correct to view this episode as formulaic for the young Christian Church: the instruction of the apostles, the selection of seven men, the laying on of hands by the apostles, etc., all point to the establishment of a form of church polity that was intended to continue. This narrative also establishes the practical outworking of the *word-charisma* and *deed-charisma* categorization that we discussed in the previous lesson: "*It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.*" The use of the Greek word root of our 'deacon' and 'diaconate' is used in this passage both for the *servicing* (*diakonein*) of tables and for the *ministry* (*diakonia*) of the Word, indicating the broad usage and meaning of the word group, which essentially means 'to serve.' Thus we must look to the manner and type of 'service' in order to determine the meaning and purpose of the church's diaconate.

This is where the distinction between *word-* and *deed-*charisma is useful as well as biblical. All Christian's are 'deacons' in the sense that all serve the Lord and one another. Paul refers to himself as a 'servant' – same word used. Writing to the Corinthian

church, the apostles rhetorically asks, “*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?*” The word translated ‘ministers’ is *diakonoi*, the plural form of the word ‘deacon.’ Indeed, this Greek word in both noun and verb forms, is perhaps the most common description of the personal responsibility as well as the interpersonal dynamic among all believers. Thus it is to the nature of the service – which stems from the nature of the gift that underlies the service – that we must turn to discover the meaning of the *deed*-charisma as well as the ministry of the ‘deacon.’

The advent of the ministry of the diaconate shows its essential purpose: *servicing tables*. Douglas Bannerman, in his *Scripture Doctrine of the Church*, writes, “‘To serve tables’ in the apostolic Church meant to concern oneself about the daily temporal wants of the household of faith, the brotherhood of the disciples of Jesus.”<sup>372</sup> This definition allows the encompassment of many of the *charismata* under the rubric of *service*, designed and distributed by the Holy Spirit to address the very real physical needs of the body of Christ, the local assembly. We are reminded here that Christianity is not a religion so much as it is a life, that the church is not an institution so much as it is a community. Considering again the *Sitz im Leben* of the early believers, we realize that these physical and temporal needs would no longer be met by the community that they had left – whether that of unbelieving Judaism or of Gentile paganism – believers were thrust together not only in a community of worship but also in a community of care. Schlatter notes, “The multiplicity of the Church’s activities rendered the creation of the diaconate imperative, for the Church ministered to all the needs of men.”<sup>373</sup> More than spiritual needs were met within this new community of faith, as Robert Banks notes, “The ‘body’ of Christ, or the gathering of the ‘church,’ is not merely a ‘communication of souls’ but a fellowship of persons in contact with each other in their totality...In quite

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<sup>372</sup> Bannerman, D. Douglas *The Scripture Doctrine of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1976); 416.

<sup>373</sup> Schlatter, *The Church in the New Testament Period*; 76.



an extraordinary way, therefore, the gifts have been designed by God to *encompass every aspect of the community's life.*"<sup>374</sup> Ridderbos summarizes,

It is to be gathered from the remainder of the New Testament that the office of the deacon especially provided for (the direction of) mutual assistance in the church and will therefore have had reference in particular to what Paul describes in Romans 12 as the *charisma* of serving, sharing, showing mercy (vv. 6-8), and in I Corinthians 12:28 as the gift given by God to the church of the 'capacity to help.'<sup>375</sup>

Thus it must be understood at the outset that the *deed*-charisma, including the office of deacon in the church, is not subordinate to that of the *word*-charisma, nor the deacon subordinate to the elder. The later development of the office of deacon as an assistant to the bishop is a corruption of the biblical model and instruction. "The use of the *diakonia* terminology points to the conclusion that the deacon serves not the bishop or elder, but the saints."<sup>376</sup> Ridderbos adds, "the deacon is not to be viewed merely as an assistant elder, or as a subordinate of the overseers, but as an office-bearer to whom a peculiar task was assigned in the proper functioning of the life of the church as the body of Christ and that he was to be acknowledged as such."<sup>377</sup>

This is not to say that there is no interchange or interrelation between the overseers (elders) and the deacons; there certainly is and must be. The physical needs of people cannot be divorced from their spiritual needs, nor can the community of faith be oriented around anything other than the gospel of Jesus Christ – regardless of the nature of the gifts or the needs. Even in the seminal narrative of Acts 6 we see this coordinate between the offices. The need at hand is eminently a *pastoral* need, for the discrimination between the two sets of widows was by no means simply because of lack of food or of innocent oversight. Hellenistic (or 'Greek') Jews were looked down upon by the Hebrew Jews, the former being viewed as compromisers by the latter. The Hellenists were either Jews who had migrated to Palestine from the Diaspora or, worse in the

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<sup>374</sup> Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*; 103, italics original.

<sup>375</sup> Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*; 459.

<sup>376</sup> Clowney; 213.

<sup>377</sup> Ridderbos; 460.

opinion of the Hebrew Jews, were Jews who had adopted Greek names, dress, and manners. That the Hellenist widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of alms was a manifestation of prejudice within the young church and was therefore a more significant (and pastoral) problem than just the serving of tables. “It is probable, then, that the reason for the neglect of the Hellenistic poor lay not in any differences of opinion or of practice, but solely in the traditional attitude of native Hebrews toward their foreign brethren.”<sup>378</sup>

This teaches us that it is often the case – and rarely not the case – that temporal needs are bound up in some way with moral and spiritual problems. It would be a mistake to conclude that, since the apostles did not take the time to deal with the issue of the distribution of alms to the widows, they did not care about the welfare of the flock. Their pastoral care is evident in the direction they gave for the remediation of the problem: “*seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.*” These descriptive terms set forth as the criteria for the first ‘deacons’ will be echoed in Paul’s ‘qualifications’ for the diaconate in I Timothy 3. Notice that a ‘keen business sense’ is not among the list. Nowhere is it stated that the deacon must be a ‘good steward’ of the church’s money, a qualification that often means ‘stingy.’ As we will see, the diaconate’s handling of the church’s finances requires that the men be ‘of good reputation,’ but the pastoral aspect of the ministry – in conjunction with the overseers – is what requires a filling of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

In summarizing the Acts 6 narrative it should be noted that the earliest form of a diaconate did not align rigidly with the *deed*-charisma as we might expect from later biblical instructions and guidelines. Two, at least, of the men selected to *serve tables* are revealed later in Acts to definitely possess *word*-charisma. Stephen, *full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people*, and successfully disputed with the unbelieving Jews, and Philip is later called an evangelist (Acts 21:8) and whose four virgin daughters were prophetesses (Acts 21:9). This situation may have been unique to the

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<sup>378</sup> M<sup>c</sup>Giffert; 77.

Acts 6 circumstances, with later appointees to both the presbytery and the diaconate being more along the lines of giftedness. Or it may be a cautionary example to prevent us from erecting walls between the gifts and thus dictating to the Holy Spirit. It is sufficient to conclude that the two basic categories – *word* and *deed* or *speaking* and *serving* – are each represented by men in the church who occupy a central coordinating role for each category: the *elders/bishops* for the *word*-charisma and the *deacons* for the *deed*-charisma. Though it may very well be that deacons can become elders (as it is certainly the case that elders are *to serve*), the essential character of the office follows the nature of the *charismata* associated with it.

### Ministry of Mercy

The ‘service’ oriented *charismata* are provided in such passages as Romans 12 (*giving* and *showing mercy*) and I Corinthians 12 (*gifts of healing, helps, administrations*) but these particular gifts need not be considered an exclusive and exhaustive list. Furthermore, it is not fully clear what exactly ‘helps’ and ‘administrations’ are. They are distinguishable mainly in the fact that they are not *speaking* gifts and are not revelatory or didactic. They are gifts of mercy, designed and distributed by the Holy Spirit to meet the very real, physical and temporal needs of the brethren. If any one of these *charisma* is representative of the whole, it would probably be that of ‘mercy.’ There was a very practical aspect to the *serving*-gifts; they were intended to help the community in very real, here-and-now terms. Strauch writes, “Since the first Christians did not have buildings to maintain, the first deacons were preeminently people-helpers and administrators of the church’s charity. They were ministers of mercy.”<sup>379</sup> It is certainly arguable whether the advent of buildings has justifiably changed this focus.

In his key treatise on *spirituals*, Paul makes little of these serving gifts by name – the emphasis is clearly on the more visible, and more prestigious, speaking gifts like prophecy and tongues. These were the gifts that the Corinthians were squabbling over, the gifts that indicated ‘rank’ among them, and therefore the gifts that the apostle had to

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<sup>379</sup> Strauch, *Deacons*; 75.

focus on in his corrective diatribe. However, it may be that the *deed*-charismata are those encompassed under the metaphor of ‘unseemly members’ which nonetheless have great honor and importance in the body.

*But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.*

(I Corinthians 12:20-26)

Certainly the allegory applies to all of the *charismata* as necessary to the well-being of the community of faith, and all of the members of the local congregation who are so gifted as the Holy Spirit determines and distributes. Yet it is not difficult to imagine that in the Corinthian church, where there were apparently some ‘heavy-weight’ spirituals – tongues-speakers, prophets, givers of words of knowledge and words of wisdom – those members who were gifted with ‘mere’ *servicing* gifts would feel less worthy and important to the body life. These would be the less visible, ‘less seemly’ gifts, yet Paul deems them no less vital to the health of the body. This interpretation may be strengthened by the apostle’s admonition that “*the members should have the same care for one another.*” Certainly the *deed*-charisma are less visible, less ‘flashy’ than the *word*-charisma. Yet we cannot say that they are less important or honorable, and we must acknowledge with Paul that their lack would mean suffering for the whole body.

Returning for a moment to the *Sitz im Leben* of the early church, we can readily understand just how important the *deed*-charismata were to the life of the body – and sometimes literally *the life* of its members. It is evident that the Holy Spirit desired the well-being of the churches in their entirety – *body, soul, and spirit*, we might say with Paul (I Thess. 5:23). The apostle devotes several chapters in his second letter to the Corinthian church dealing with the offering for the saints in Judea who were suffering

from famine and poverty. The care of the physical body is every bit as important to him as the care of the soul. Acknowledging again how ‘spiritual’ the Corinthians are, Paul admonishes them not to fall behind in this *diaconal* work as well, notably calling it a ‘grace.’

*Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. But as you abound in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us – see that you abound in this grace also.* (II Corinthians 8:1-7)

Later, in Chapter 9, Paul speaks of how the giving ministry – itself a ministry of mercy – abounds to the glory of God through thanksgiving. The apostle is exuberant in this regard in a way not seen when writing to this church about their tongues and prophecy.

*Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!* (II Corinthians 9:10-15)

But the apostle did not intend for this gathering of support for the Judean Church to be a haphazard affair. Indeed, we might say from reading these two chapters in II Corinthians, that he desired the entire matter to be done *decently and in order*. He desires that the gift be fully prepared *before* he and his associates arrived, ready to be sent with him and whomever the Corinthian church should select, to take the gift to Jerusalem. His note is unmistakable: *be prepared*.

*Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority. Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting. Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.*

(I Corinthians 9:1-5)

### **Charismata with Order**

As with the speaking gifts, the *word-charisma*, we find here order required in the *deed-charisma*. And just as with the *word-charisma* we also find an ‘office’ established in the local congregation to bring this order to the *deed-charisma*: the *presbytery* for the one, and the *diaconate* for the other. There is, of course, no mention of deacons in Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, but then there was no mention of elders, either, and we know from Clement’s letter that the church in Corinth did have elders. Indeed, Paul established this pattern, as we say in the last lesson, on the return leg of his first missionary journey; it is reasonable to conclude that the leadership structure we find there and in the later Pastoral Epistles represents an apostolic pattern for all the churches. Paul was nothing if not consistent, as he reminds his readers frequently (*cp.* I Cor. 11:16; 14:33).

Contrary to much modern scholarship concerning the ‘offices’ of the church, these did not develop, nor were they set in place, in order to replace the *charismata*. Rather they were put in place so that the *charismata* might be ‘set in order’ (*cp.* Titus 1:5). Ridderbos notes, “It applies to the office of deacon, too, that it did not come in place of the charismatic ministries, but that it rather rested on them, but nevertheless proved to be necessary for regular and assured order in this work.”<sup>380</sup> Schlatter points out that the ‘titles’ bestowed on church leaders were both functional and humble: *overseer* and *servant*.

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<sup>380</sup> Ridderbos; 460.

By conferring this title upon her leaders [*i.e.*, episkopos; overseer], the community expressed exactly her chief concern, the building or edifying of the people of God. She provided herself with leaders to supervise the work of building the House of God. She did not seize upon a grand, resounding title for the development of her constitution. The names of all her office-holders remained, like her whole language, simple, serious, free of ostentation and phrase-mongering. When she named the administrators of her property her 'servants' (deacons) there was no contemptuous, depreciating sound about it. To serve was the highest honour, for they served the people whom God had sanctified to be his own... Thus the Church expressed the truth that she did not create this office in order to prevent others from working and to reduce them to passivity. All are builders, all are made alive through the life of the community, all are made active by her call.<sup>381</sup>

The idea of a 'bishop' as the head of the church (and the bishop of Rome as Christ's Vicar on earth) or of deacons as ecclesiastical offices is completely foreign both to the text and to the spirit of Paul's writings. Such a development can only be seen as a usurpation of the role of the Holy Spirit in distributing *His* grace-gifts to each believer in the congregation for the building up of the whole. This is the 'lording over' which Jesus forbade. T. M. Lindsay reminds us, "for rule and leadership according to the primitive modes of thought are always founded on 'service' and never on 'lordship.'"<sup>382</sup> To view the 'offices' biblically, therefore, we must not view them hierarchically. There is indeed a higher level of responsibility, but not of honor or worth. Banks concludes,

We cannot say, then, that Paul's communities were hierarchical in structure. He did not vest authority in one man, or in a group of men, over the remaining members who merely had to receive and submit. On the other hand his communities were not egalitarian either. He did not vest authority in all equally nor did his communities select or call certain people to act on their behalf in some democratic fashion. Paul's communities were instead theocratic in structure. Because God gave to each individual within the community some contribution for its welfare, there is a strong democratic note – everyone participates authoritatively in its activities. Because the Spirit distributes his gifts and advantages unequally, so that some have more to contribute than others, there is also an element of differentiation. But neither of these tendencies is given a formal structure. Instead they are transformed through their subordination to the charismatic and, if I may coin the term, the 'diaconic' principle.<sup>383</sup>

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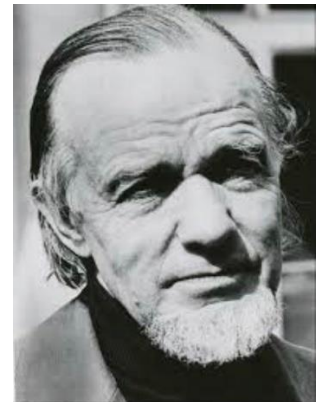
<sup>381</sup> Schlatter; *The Church*; 78.

<sup>382</sup> Lindsay; 151.

<sup>383</sup> Banks; 150.

### The Qualifications of a Deacon

When we therefore look to the qualifications of a deacon, as those of an elder, we find that they are, by and large, what is to be expected of each and every believer. Lindsay continues, “the qualities which were to determine the selection of men to be leaders were those qualities of stable Christian character which all Christians ought to possess.”<sup>384</sup> This fact shows that the elder and the deacon were not ‘super-Christians’ possessing attributes and gifts that the ordinary believer could not hope to attain. Far from it. Both the elders and the deacons were to operate in their respective class of *charismata* as examples to the rest of the congregation (*cp.* I Peter 5:3) and not as sole possessors and dominant dispensers of the gifts. “One of the chief services which belonged to those who were placed at the head of the Christian communities was to set an example to those under their charge.”<sup>385</sup> Yet the fact that Paul troubles himself to enumerate characteristics for both the elders and the deacons shows that their place in the congregation is vital and not to be taken lightly. Strauch quotes Francis Schaeffer on the importance of maintaining the same standard for the selection of church leaders as we find in the Pastoral Epistles, “The church has no right to diminish these standards for the officers of the church, nor does it have any right to elevate any other as though they are then equal to these which are commanded by God himself. These and only these stand as absolute.”<sup>386</sup>



Francis Schaeffer (1912-84)

This attitude was maintained into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, though it was soon lost as the hierarchical and institutional structure of the church – centered in a singular bishop – began to take root. Yet in the Letter of Ignatius to the Trallians (c. AD 108) we read, “Those too who are deacons of Jesus Christ’s ‘mysteries’ must give complete satisfaction to everyone. For they do not serve mere food and drink, but minister to God’s

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<sup>384</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>385</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>386</sup> Strauch, *Deacons*; 88.



Church. They must therefore avoid leaving themselves open to criticism, as they would shun fire.”<sup>387</sup> Polycarp’s Letter to the Philippians (c. AD 135) echoes Paul’s own words in regard to the deacons of the church, “Likewise the deacons should be blameless before his righteousness, as servants of God and Christ and not of men; not slanderers, or double-tongued, not lovers of money, temperate in all matters, compassionate, careful, living according to the truth of the Lord, who became ‘servant of all’; to whom, if we are pleasing in the present age, we shall also obtain the age to come.”<sup>388</sup> And the *Didache*, the ‘Teaching of the Twelve,’ adds “You must, then, elect for yourselves bishops and deacons who are a credit to the Lord, men who are gentle, generous, faithful, and well tried. For their ministry to you is identical with that of the prophets and teachers. You must not, therefore, despise them, for along with the prophets and teachers they enjoy a place of honor among you.”<sup>389</sup>

Considering, then, the ‘qualifications’ of the deacon from I Timothy 3,

*Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

(I Timothy 3:8-13)

By way of context, Paul provides us with the reason for both the qualifications of the bishop and the deacon just a few verses further on: “*These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*”<sup>390</sup> To the apostle, the quality of the congregational officers has in immediate bearing on the status of the church in the world, and the status of the

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<sup>387</sup> Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*; 99.

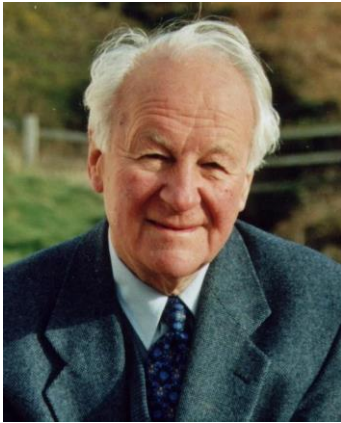
<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*; 133.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*; 178.

<sup>390</sup> I Timothy 3:14-15

church in the world has a direct impact on truth in the world. This is serious; it is not just ‘administration.’

A comparison of the ‘qualifications’ between the bishop and the deacon will, of course, highlight one main exception for the latter: the deacon is not required to be *apt to teach*. This is as would be expected for those who are leading by example in the *deed*-charisma rather than the *word*-charisma. However, this must not be taken as though doctrinal standards have no place within the diaconate – an error too often made in the



John Stott (1921-2011)

church. The deacon must also “*hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.*” Thus even though the deacon need not have the teaching gift, this does not mean that doctrine has no part in the office. Rather the deacons must themselves hold fast to sound doctrine with a good conscience. This is something that the church has often lost sight of – that true biblical benevolence is itself doctrinal, and by no means devoid of the principles of the faith. John

Stott comments, “*For deep truths translates to mysterion*, and this ‘mystery’ is the sum total of the revealed truth of the faith. These the deacons must hold fast. And unlike the false teachers, who have rejected their conscience and so shipwrecked their faith (1:19), and have even ‘cauterized’ their conscience by constantly disregarding it (4:2), the deacons are to maintain ‘a clear conscience,’ holding on to God’s revelation with sincere and strong conviction.”<sup>391</sup> It may be the duty of the elder to *teach* the faith, but the deacon must nonetheless *hold* it firmly and accurately. This is a dimension sadly lost in the modern church with regard to the diaconate.

It is probably in reference to this that Paul immediately says, “*And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.*”<sup>392</sup> It stands to reason that the giftedness of the men is already apparent to the congregation before they are nominated for the diaconate, so this ‘testing,’ following on the heels of the apostle’s

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<sup>391</sup> Stott, John *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1996); 100.

<sup>392</sup> I Timothy 3:10

admonition concerning their doctrinal integrity, and in light of the pervasive heresy already troubling the Ephesian church, concerns their doctrinal stance. Certainly examinations on church doctrine entered the ordination process very early in the post-apostolic era, and remain a feature of modern evangelicalism. However, it is significant to note that ‘licensure’ – the commissioning of a man to preach – is generally only performed for those who are going into the ministry of the word as pastors. Elders and deacons are rarely ‘tested’ in any manner like the preacher. Also, this testing now usually follows some form of organized instruction and receipt of a degree from a Bible college or seminary. It is hard to conceive of Paul envisioning the rigidity of ‘licensure’ on the one hand, and the almost complete neglect of any testing for the ‘other’ elders and the deacons, on the other.

Should elders and deacons be subject to a licensure examination? Does a written and/or oral examination ‘prove’ the man’s doctrinal integrity? The word translated ‘tested’ in verse 10 is the same as Peter uses in regard to the ‘genuineness’ of one’s faith, more precious than gold, though ‘tested’ by fire (*cf.* I Peter 1:7). It is also the same word used by Paul in Romans 12, where we are exhorted not “*to be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may ‘prove’ what the will of God is, that which is good, and acceptable, and perfect.*”<sup>393</sup> Thus while the ‘proving’ or ‘testing’ does appear to be a process, there is no reason to think that the ‘proof’ of one’s faith, or of a deacon’s integrity, is to be summed up by either a written or oral examination. Rather it would seem that the examination is of one’s whole life and conduct. Vincent comments in his *Word Studies in the New Testament*, “Not implying a formal examination, but a reference to the general judgment of the Christian community as to whether they fulfill the conditions detailed in ver. 8.”<sup>394</sup>

Paul seemingly interrupts his train of thought in verse 11 by repeating the ‘marker’ term, *likewise*, and mentioning the required qualifications of *women* or *wives*. The word used here is the generic *gunaiikes* which can be translated either way, the con-

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<sup>393</sup> Romans 12:2

<sup>394</sup> Vincent, Marvin R. *Word Studies in the New Testament: Volume IV* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons; 1900); 236.

text determining. Unfortunately, the context has not determined definitively among commentators, from the earliest times until now. There are solid arguments in favor of the translation ‘women,’ as well as for that of ‘wives.’ It is impossible to be definitive in either direction, and it may be that Paul intended both.

First, we must note that the Greek word for deacon, *diakonous* (pl.), did not have a feminine construction in the time of Paul. William Mounce, a noted Greek scholar, points out, “The feminine form of the word *diakonos* had not yet been created...The first reference to *diakonissa* occurs in the fourth century in canon 19 of the Council of Nicea.”<sup>395</sup> The only reference to a woman as ‘deacon’ is that of Pheobe in Romans 16:1, where she is called “*a deacon (diakonon – masculine) in the church at Cench-*



William Mounce (b. 1953)

*rea.*” This is often seen as explaining why the apostle does not preface his remarks in I Timothy 3:11 with the feminine form of the word: there was no feminine form. But even this is not definitive, for it was far from beyond Paul to make up a new word where one did not exist for his use. Mounce, acknowledging the different opinions throughout the millennia, summarizes the import, “Whatever the specific interpretation of this verse may be, it is not related to the issue of women in leadership since the deacon(ess) does not provide authoritative leadership. There is no question that women were to play a significant role in serving the church.”<sup>396</sup> This is an important point to remember as we continue our exegesis of the verse.

The argument in favor of translating the word as *women* and concluding that Paul here speaks of what would later (though not much later) be called ‘deaconesses,’ is the structure of the verse in comparison with verse 8 – the two verses are in almost identical parallel. Each is introduced with the connector, *likewise*. In verse 8 this word is used to introduce the office of deacon in comparison to that of the elder/bishop. The qualifications of the elder are enumerated and then, switching to the second office of

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<sup>395</sup> Mounce, William D. *Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers; 2000); 202.

<sup>396</sup> *Idem.*

deacon, Paul says, “likewise, deacons...” Patrick Fairbairn, a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Scottish Presbyterian minister and theologian, concludes that Paul intends the second ‘likewise’ to



Patrick Fairbairn (1805-74)

introduce what amounts to a third office, that of the ‘deaconess,’ the women deacons. Fairbairn writes, “The mode of expression employed in introducing the women, *gunaikas hosautōs*, apparently marking a transition to another class; also the absence of either the article or the pronoun to connect the women with the men spoken of before; and further, the mention only of such qualifications in respect to the women as might fit them for confidential employment in deacon-work,

while nothing is said of those more directly bearing on domestic duties; - these considerations seem very much to favour the view adopted already by Chrysostom, - adopted as too obvious to require any explanation...that not deacons’ wives, but female deacons, are meant.” George Knight also notes the comparison between verses 8 and 11 as significant, though he comes to a different conclusion overall than does Fairbairn, “They [*i.e.*, the ‘women’ in verse 11] are distinguished from and compared with the preceding category of *diakonoi* by the adverb *hosautōs* with its comparative sense of ‘likewise,’ just as the *diakonoi* have been previously distinguished from and compared with the *episkopos* by the same word.”<sup>397</sup>

Fairbairn also notes that the typical manner of indicating that a man or a woman is the spouse of one already mentioned is the attachment of either a definite article (‘the’) or a possessive pronoun (‘his’ or ‘her’). Neither of these traditional markers of spousal relationship are present in verse 11. This, however, is by no means definitive, as the lack of the article or pronoun can often be overridden by the context. At best, the omission of the article or pronoun is one point in favor of *women deacons*, as Stott writes, “In favour of ‘deaconesses,’ the ‘likewise’ of verse 11, like that of verse 8, leads one to expect a new category; it would be strange for deacons’ wives to be mentioned when

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<sup>397</sup> Knight, George W. *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1992); 170.

elders' wives are not; there is no definite article or possessive pronoun before 'women' which there would have to be if it meant 'their wives'; and we know from Pheobe that there were women deacons or deaconesses at that time."<sup>398</sup> Strengthening this argument is the fact that the qualification listed for the women after the 'likewise' identical to those following the same word in verse 8. The introductory phrase in both locations is:

**I Timothy 3:8**

*"deacons likewise must be serious..."*  
(diakonous hosautōs semnous)

**I Timothy 3:11**

*"women likewise must be serious..."*  
(gunaikas hosautōs semnous)

The primary argument against translating *gunaikas* as 'women' and rather rendering it as 'wives,' is the awkwardness of the location of the verse, seeming to interrupt the flow of qualifications pertaining to the male deacons. Paul returns to these in verse 12. Mounce comments, "It would be awkward to discuss deacons in vv 8-10, switch to a different topic in v 11, and then return to deacons in vv 12-13 without a textual clue that the topic has changed."<sup>399</sup> Of course, those who advocate 'deaconess' as the proper translation argue that the repetition of the connecting 'likewise' is the textual clue indicating a change in topic. What this view cannot explain is the abrupt return to the former topic. But logical flow would have been better preserved – if Paul was speaking of deacons' wives – if verse 11 was actually found *after* verse 12, for then it would follow the requirement that the deacon be a 'one woman man,' the word for woman in verse 12 being the very same as in verse 11. But it may be that Paul mentions women deacons in verse 11 *in order* not to



George Knight (1931-2021)

confuse the issue by mentioning them in the midst of the deacons' domestic situation. Perhaps the most we can conclude is that women were associated with the diaconal ministry in the church, either as wives who assisted their husbands in the diaconate, or

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<sup>398</sup> Stott; 101.

<sup>399</sup> Mounce; 203.

as women who also had a serving ministry – a *deed*-charisma – in the church. Knight concludes, “In general terms, the answer would appear to be that they are in some way involved in the diaconal service that the *diakonoi* are called to perform.”<sup>400</sup>

This is an equivocating interpretation sure to satisfy no one in the modern debate regarding women in ministry in the church. The evidence of Phoebe stands strongly in favor of the *deaconess* view, sufficient alone to convince no less a biblical scholar than Benjamin Warfield that there were deaconesses in the apostolic church.<sup>401</sup> There is no evidence in the earliest records of the post-apostolic church that women were *ordained* to the office of deacon – an office uniformly reserved for men throughout the early Christian centuries. Yet there is ample record of women serving the church in such a manner as to be called ‘deaconesses’ or even ‘ministers.’ Paul refers to Phoebe as such, and to other women as ‘fellow workers,’ etc. When we stop to remember the purpose of the *charismata* – the building up of the community – it does not take long to realize that many tasks of service in the church would be better administered, and with greater propriety, by women rather than by men. Such service may have been fulfilled by deacons’ wives, or by widows, or, later, by virgins, but there is no reason to doubt that the early church considered such service *diaconal* and such servants, *deaconesses*. Schaff writes of the role of deaconess, “It opened to pious women and virgins, and chiefly to widows, a most suitable field for the regular official exercise of their peculiar gifts of self-denying charity and devotion to the welfare of the church.”<sup>402</sup> Remembering again that the diaconal ministry is not authoritative or in leadership over the church, there seems no reason why there should be *male or female* in the service of the saints. Absent specific guidelines from the New Testament, the form that this service ministry takes in any congregation is left to the wisdom of God granted to the believers in that community.

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<sup>400</sup> Knight; 170-71.

<sup>401</sup> Warfield, Benjamin B. “Presbyterian Deaconesses” [B. B. Warfield on women's work and the office of deaconess... | BaylyBlog](#). Accessed 15 November 2022.

<sup>402</sup> Schaff; 500.

**Lesson 15 – Eschatological People of God – Part I**

**Text: Colossians 3:12-17; Ephesians 5:15-21; Romans 8:14-17; 12:1-21**

*“The purpose of the church is rather  
the edification of its members  
through their God-given ministry to one another.”  
(Robert Banks)*

That the regular meetings of the Christian churches changed after the apostles departed the scene is an undeniable historical fact. Some would call this change ‘evolution,’ assigning a certain inevitability and even propriety and benefit to it. Many, if not most, of these changes were beyond the letter of Scripture and, it has appeared in this study, beyond the intention of the Apostle Paul through his epistles. Still, many theologians – and not least *Protestant* theologians – have attributed the modifications in church worship, polity, and purpose to the guiding of the Holy Spirit and therefore to the will of God. With breathtaking irony, modern scholars claim that the passing away of the *charismata* – the ‘gifts of the Holy Spirit’ – and the consequent rise of a clerical ministry, were the working of the Holy Spirit himself! That the average church today owes more to *Robert’s Rules of Order* as to its liturgy than to the letters of Paul is itself often attributed to one verse in the Pauline corpus: I Corinthians 14:40. Oscar Cullmann justifiably indicts the modern, Protestant Church in comparison to the churches planted and nurtured by Paul.

In the light of these forms, we must assert here and now that the services of worship in the Protestant Churches of our own era are very much poorer, not only in respect of the free working of the Spirit, but also in respect of what is liturgical and especially in respect of what is aimed at in the gatherings of the community. The aim is constantly described by Paul as building up of the community.<sup>403</sup>

Generation after generation of believers, however, read Paul’s letters to the Roman, Corinthians, Ephesian, Colossian, and Philippians churches and realize that ‘church’ then was nothing like ‘church’ now. The participation of every member providing what is needed for the “*growing up of the body in love*” has been replaced with a min-

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<sup>403</sup> Cullmann, Oscar *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM Press; 1966); 26.



isterial staff and a 'worship team' (which used to just be called a 'choir'). This generational reassessment of the church's liturgy has led to chronic attempts to reincorporate the *charismata* into the liturgy through pietistic and charismatic movements – the Charismatic Movement of the 1970s was merely one in a long line of such occurrences in church history. An either/or mentality has prevailed in every era, between a more staid but doctrinally stable church or a freer by more unpredictable church. It has been the thesis of this study that the opposition is unwarranted from Paul's viewpoint. The missing link, however, in most treatments of the topic is that of *eschatology*, and not the still-anticipated consummation of the ages, but the earnest expectation of the Jewish nation, fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In other words: *Paul's* eschatology.

Instead of getting down in the weeds, as most writers do, by analyzing every *charism* mentioned in the New Testament – 'helps,' 'tongues & interpretation of tongues,' 'prophecy,' etc. *ad nauseum* – we must remember what the forest looks like. It looks like the covenantal promises of God – both to the whole human race and to His peculiar people Israel – have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ and through the sending of the Holy Spirit God has constituted to himself an *eschatological people* from "every tongue, tribe, and nation." This view has been clouded by the ecclesiological mutations of the past twenty centuries, and obscured even further by the teaching of Dispensationalism, in which all that is happening now in the Church is divorced from the eschatological hope of Israel. Both of these views would be both foreign and anathema to Paul, and should be to the church in every generation. The believing community is that "on whom the end of the ages has come" and is therefore the people for whom God has finally completed His covenantal promises through Jesus Christ. We have seen in the past few lessons just how central Joel 2:28-29 is to a proper understanding of the eschatological consequence of the coming of the Messiah: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. But we need also to be reminded often that the 'Vision of the Dry Bones' in Ezekiel 37 is not a *future* prophecy for a reconstituted national Israel, but is rather the resuscitation of the 'Israel

of God' by the Holy Spirit – only now given because of Christ's Ascension.<sup>404</sup> Paul makes it clear that he understood God's work in Christ Jesus and through the Holy Spirit to be the fulfillment of the divine, covenantal promises in Old Testament passages such as these. Ridderbos understands this to be the central and essential feature of Paul's preaching, "The whole content of this preaching can be summarized as the proclamation and explication of the eschatological time of salvation inaugurated with Christ's advent, death, and resurrection."<sup>405</sup> Thus, in Ephesians 2 the apostle leaves no doubt that he considers there to be only *one* people of God – Israel and all who are joined to her through her Messiah, Jesus. Furthermore, this 'joining together' is by and through the Holy Spirit whom the Father and the Son have sent from heaven into the hearts of those who believe.

*Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands – that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.*  
(Ephesians 2:11-18)

This same truth is taught by Paul in figurative language in Romans 9-11, though it is no less clear for that.

*For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be*

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<sup>404</sup> Cp. Ezek. 37:1-28; John 7 39

<sup>405</sup> Ridderbos, *Paul*; 44.

*grafted in.” Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?* (Romans 11:13-24)

It is perhaps not too much to say that the teachings of Paul underwent a massive change in venue in the early centuries of the Church, from the setting of the Old Testament and the eschatological hope of Israel to the setting of the Gentile world in which the Church grew rapidly and became essentially a Gentile institution rather than the Jewish-Gentile olive tree of which the apostle speaks. So powerful was this change in venue that it actually fostered historical antisemitism, as Jews were alleged to be ‘Christ-killers’ and enemies of God and His people. Paul, it seems, anticipated this perversion and sought, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to ward it off. He reminds his Gentile readers in Rome that, while unbelieving Israel is the enemy of the gospel, the people of Israel remain the chosen of God and salvation for any Gentile must mean engrafting into that people through the Holy Spirit, in Christ Jesus.

*Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. For God has <sup>406</sup>committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.* (Romans 11:28-32)

It certainly cannot be without reason that Paul immediately erupts in one of the most beautiful doxologies in Scripture, “*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!*”<sup>406</sup> This itself should remind every generation of believers that what Paul has just said in the previous three chapters (Romans 9-11) can only be understood (1) from a thoroughly Old Testament and *eschatological* perspective and (2) if it leads to an expostulation of

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<sup>406</sup> Romans 11:33

praise to the glory of God's grace. This is the inheritance of the Church and every movement away from Paul's vision of the believing community is a denial and betrayal of the Church's birthright.

We have noted in this study that two phenomena are equally detrimental to the health of the believing community: clericalism and individualism. Both are involved in removing the Church from its Pauline blueprint, but perhaps the second one is most obstructive in terms of the church understanding her identity as a 'people.' Modern concepts of people are essentially aggregate individualism: people are the sum total of the individuals present, or of a nation or other organization. This is neither an ancient nor a biblical understanding of the concept, as Paul Minear points out, "People in general do not exist; there are only particular peoples. Each people has a separate and cohesive actuality of its own. Every person belongs to a particular people, just as he belongs to a particular tongue or nation or tribe; and this people is not reducible to the mathematical aggregate of its members."<sup>407</sup> This understanding of 'people' as corporate rather than aggregate underlies the prophecy of Hosea, later quoted by Paul with regard to Gentile believers. In that prophecy the main distinction in the world is made clear: there are "Ammi" ('My people') and "Lo-ammi" ('Not-My-People'). Paul refers to this prophecy of Hosea in Romans 9, where he begins writing about the grafting in of the Gentiles to the people of God, Israel, and explaining how the unbelief of much of Israel did not negate the covenant promises of God, nor the divine faithfulness to those promises.

*What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As He says also in Hosea:*

*"I will call them My people, who were not My people,  
And her beloved, who was not beloved."  
And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them,  
'You are not My people,' there they shall be called sons of the living God."*

(Romans 9:22-26)

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<sup>407</sup>Minear 68.

Thus biblical redemption is not so much about ‘making Jesus your personal Lord and Savior’ as it is God creating for himself a ‘people’ from the whole of mankind, a people who are then set over against mankind as a ‘peculiar people.’ Banks writes, “Humanity is not visualized as a world-wide census of individuals, but as the separate peoples that, taken together, comprise mankind as a whole. Each people retains its own discrete unity. Therefore, to identify a particular society as the people of God is immediately to set it over against all other peoples.”<sup>408</sup> Of all the descriptions discussed regarding the Church (*i.e.*, the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, etc.) this one – *the people of God* – is undoubtedly the most essential. It is also the most important to the Church’s own understanding not only of her identity but also of her purpose, which then translates into the biblical manner of her assembly, her *life*. Thomas Schreiner reminds us that “God’s intention was not merely to save individuals but to create a new community, a new people for his glory.”<sup>409</sup> But Schreiner would agree (and does elsewhere in the same work) that the term ‘new’ must not be interpreted as something that never existed before, or that has no roots in what God had done before. Wright clarifies, “Who are we? We are a new group, a new movement, and yet not new, because we claim to be the true people of the god of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the creator of the world. We are the people for whom the creator god was preparing the way through his dealings with Israel.”<sup>410</sup>

Most modern, Western evangelicals have the vaguest of ideas regarding the ‘community’ of the church – the ‘communion of the saints’ as Paul puts it. Church has become a voluntary society in which peoples’ (and by that we mean ‘individuals’) needs are met through encouraging preaching, life-specific counseling groups, and ‘safe’ childcare. Within the evangelical community, most professing believers would be able to speak to the concept of the ‘church’ being ‘in Christ’ and her existence being somehow related to His resurrection, but because of the pervasive impact of Dispensa-

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<sup>408</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>409</sup> Schreiner; 370.

<sup>410</sup> Wright, N. T. *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 1992); 369. Note: Wright does not capitalize the name ‘God’ until much later in this series. He gives his reasoning for this in the Preface to *NTPG*, page xiv.

tionalism, at least in the United States, very little could be said by most regarding the relationship of the Church to Israel and to God's overall redemptive plan.

But the modern church is anemic, and losing membership from generation to generation, a statistical fact that few members and perhaps even fewer preachers can explain. We might be able to articulate the Church as the Body of Christ brought into being through His death and resurrection, but we fail to see – as Paul did not fail to see – that this event marked the fulfillment of the eschatological hope of Israel, and consequently the advent of a New Creation. Furthermore, and further failure, we have almost completely lost sight of the role of the Holy Spirit in that eschatological hope – *cp.* Ezekiel 37 again – and have substituted a manmade liturgy and hierarchical clergy to replace the 'living stones' of the holy temple. We need to recover this understanding if the Church, and churches, are ever to have impact in the world. Ridderbos comments, "We must recall...that for Paul, just as for the whole of the primitive Christian church, the Holy Spirit is pre-eminently the eschatological gift, the revelation of the great time of salvation."<sup>411</sup> And Minear reminds us that "'Spirit' was one of those terms which, as we have seen, expressed the ontological ultimacy of the new age."<sup>412</sup>

Paul refers to the Holy Spirit as the 'earnest' of the saints' inheritance, the 'down-payment' of what God has promised to fulfill at the consummation of the ages. The Spirit is the 'seal' of redemption for every believer, assuring him or her of the final salvation to come at the *Parousia*. And Paul understood this outpouring and indwelling of the Holy Spirit to be just as important as the resurrection of Jesus Christ in announcing the advent of the messianic age, the fulfillment of the eschatological hope of Israel. It is not too much to say that the Incarnation alone was just another tabernacle *among* God's people, whereas the consequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit has made that tabernacle to dwell *within* God's people.<sup>413</sup> And for Paul, the eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit has internationalized the people of God, bringing the Gentiles into the covenant com-

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<sup>411</sup> Ridderbos; 87.

<sup>412</sup> Minear; 237.

<sup>413</sup> Reference Mark Freitag, Sunday School lesson at Fellowship Bible Church, October 30, 2022.

munity through the same faith in Jesus Christ by which native Israelites enter. In Ephesians, the apostle writes,

*In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.*

(Ephesians 1:13-14)

The terms Paul uses in referring to the Holy Spirit – *earnest, surety, seal, down-payment* – all point to something yet to come. And this something is what the teaching and preaching of the Church has focused on whenever it does speak of the future hope of believers. But these words also speak of something *now*: a foretaste of what is to come, yes; but also something real and tangible in the here-and-now. The down-payment is part of the principal, and the seal is the mark of ownership of that which is sealed. There is a present reality in the Church of a future promise, and this is preeminently the role of the Holy Spirit in this ‘age in between.’ The Holy Spirit having been poured out at Pentecost and now residing in the true Temple of God, the Body of Jesus Christ, the Church, is the presence of the future in the present age. Cullmann writes, “Pentecost is the beginning of the Church, the opening stage of the realization of the people of God in the end of time. The Spirit overcomes the separation of nations divided by language. But the Spirit is the element of the future Kingdom of God.”<sup>414</sup> This fact is a – if not *the* – crucial marker of the Church’s identity and place in any age: she is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and therefore is the presence of the future in the world today. “The Church already belongs entirely to the end and still belongs entirely to the present.”<sup>415</sup>

Paul’s understanding of the Church is pivotal in human history, for she is the presence of the future glory of the Kingdom of God in every age prior to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. There can hardly be a ‘higher’ church view than this, and without vestments added! But the Church must at all times and in every age understand

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<sup>414</sup> Cullmann, *The Early Church*; 116.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*; 119.

both her ontological position in the world of her time, and the fact that it is the Holy Spirit who constitutes her to be what she is intended to be. “The community that is created by this Spirit becomes a partnership in the epoch of consummation, receiving the first fruits of that epoch and bearing within itself the pledge of the redemption of all things.”<sup>416</sup>

But what it is that makes the Church operate in the present age (*any* present age) as the presence of the future? This is the question of practical application: if the church, meaning the local assembly no less than the universal Church, is the abiding presence of the future Lord at any given time and age, *how* does this phenomenon manifest itself? The answer lies in the identity of the divine Being who constitutes the Church, and the local church, to be the Temple of God in Jesus Christ – the Holy Spirit. And the practical outworking of His presence – and the presence of the future in and through Him – is, according to Paul, manifested in the *charismata*. This is the fundamental meaning behind the demolition of ethnic, racial, national, and even gender distinctions that so powerfully impact human society in all of its other forms. “Above all it is important to recognize the transition of conceptuality from a community identified by ethnic and traditional markers to a community where Christ and the Spirit were the essential distinguishing features, that is, the grace of Christ and the charisms given by his Spirit, with all that that involved.”<sup>417</sup>

Can the modern (again, ‘modern’ as in whatever age the church is found) consider itself to be ‘Pauline’ if it ignores the *charismata*, marginalizes the *charismata* through clericalism, or renders the *charismata* nothing more than personal giftedness through pervasive individualism? Dunn points out in his study of Pauline Theology that the very word *charism* (or *charisma*, *charismata* – different forms of the same root word) is uniquely Pauline – another one of those words that, while not coined by the apostle, were given new currency through his writings and his understanding of the God’s purpose in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Dunn writes, “It is another case of a word

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<sup>416</sup> Minear; 134.

<sup>417</sup> Dunn; 560-61.



having little significance before Paul took it up, transformed it by his usage, and gave it the status of a technical term of Christian theology. In fact its Pauline character is more sharply marked than in almost any other Pauline term. It is hardly attested prior to Paul, and the examples in secular usage are all much later than Paul."<sup>418</sup> Banks adds, "The importance of this term 'gift' lies in its expressing the basic principle involved in Paul's approach to the dynamics of church."<sup>419</sup> Life in the church, therefore, is nothing less than the free movement of the Holy Spirit as He distributes His *charismata* to each member, for the building up of the whole body (*cp.* again Eph. 4:16).

The etymology of the word centers on the concept of 'grace,' as the noun form stems from the verb *charizesthai* which means 'give graciously.'<sup>420</sup> Thus it may be said that every church, founded as it is on divine grace, is a *charismatic* church. But what can then be said for a church in which the *charismata* are stifled or distilled into a few clerical ministerial positions? Since Paul views the *charismata* as the "concrete materialization of God's grace,"<sup>421</sup> any church in which the *charismata* are not functioning is, by definition and practically, graceless. Reformed theologians speak much of the 'means of grace,' but perhaps Paul is the one who speaks most powerfully and most truthfully about the true means of grace – the 'grace gifts' given by the Holy Spirit *to each one individually just as He wills*. "In other words, the charism is a function of the member (the limb or organ) of the body. The charism is the contribution which the individual member makes to the whole, its function within the body as a whole. The body functions charismatically."<sup>422</sup> Banks points out that the *charismata* are not really manifestations of the Spirit as much as they are manifestations of God's grace – they are 'grace gifts,' and the mean by which God's grace functions within the body of Christ. Following closely on Jesus' own teaching regarding the ministry of the Holy Spirit whom the Father would send in His name, Banks writes,

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<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*; 553.

<sup>419</sup> Banks; 94.

<sup>420</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>421</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*; 554.

Since he [*i.e.*, the Holy Spirit] is only the medium of God's and Christ's action, to talk of the 'gifts of the Spirit' as if he were their source is misleading. The gifts are derived not from the Spirit, *pneuma*, but from God's grace, *charis*. They are its concrete expression.

Dunn adds, "the character of charism [is] an enactment or embodiment of divine *charis*, 'grace.' It is this which makes the body of the Christian community the body of *Christ*."<sup>423</sup> When this is understood there can be no discussion of 'cessation' of the *charismata*, though, as we have seen, the gifts themselves will vary according to the need of the community, the purpose of edification being paramount and permanent. "So far as the duration of the *charismata* is concerned, they are clearly not temporary in character but permanent features of the community's life as long as this present age lasts. They are not given merely to help the churches get started but are intended as the main constituents of their gatherings so long as they continue to meet."<sup>424</sup>

This structural characteristic of the *charismata*, which should be undeniable in the light of Paul's letters, illustrates why it is so misleading to focus on particular 'gifts' that are mentioned in those letters, as if the church of all ages would have only a specific handful of needs and, therefore, the corresponding 'gifts.' This is perhaps the most fundamental and fatal error of modern Pentecostalism and charismatic 'movements': the attempt to duplicate in the current age the *Sitz im Leben* of 1<sup>st</sup> Century Corinth or Rome or Ephesus. This erroneous perspective fails utterly to see that *edification* is the central theme in all that Paul writes – the building up of the body, the community of believers, by what *each joint and ligament supplies*. "Thus Paul nowhere attempts to provide a systematic or full description of the gifts available to the Christian community. Indeed it is reasonable to assume on the basis of the gifts included in these lists [*i.e.*, Rom. 12, I Cor. 12, etc.], that any contribution by any member of the community of a constructive nature would be recognized by Paul as a gift."<sup>425</sup>

It is hard to stress the point of the universal distribution of the *charismata* too firmly, for in this reality lies the true life of the church, and nowhere else. There is no

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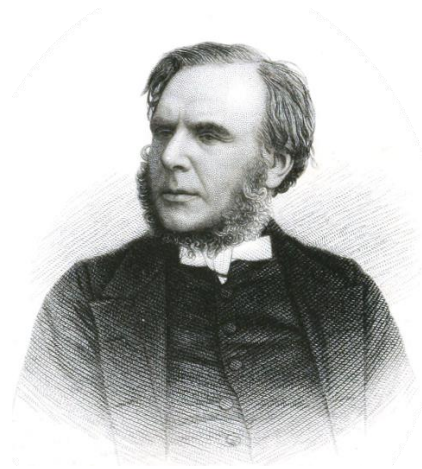
<sup>423</sup> Dunn; 559.

<sup>424</sup> Banks; 95.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*; 98.

## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

life in liturgy; no life in hierarchy or clericalism; no life in discipleship programs or nouthetic counseling. In short, any church is 'alive' only to the extent that the Holy Spirit is able to move within the community through the grace-gifts He distributes to each believing member. "The member of the body is not just the individual, but the functioning member, the member with his or her charism or charisms. Individuals are members of the body as charismatics. The main thrust of Paul's vivid exposition of the body in 1 Cor. 12.14-26 is to reinforce this point. He has no conception of a distinction between functioning and nonfunctioning members, between those who minister to and those who are only ministered to."<sup>426</sup> This is the description of the Church, and of each church, that we read in the New Testament; this is the true 'Pentecostal' church that was not merely for a season but for all time. Islay Burns summarizes, "In the Pentecostal Church thus fully constituted, and endued with divine life from above, we behold the image and the type of the true and living Church of Christ in all after times."<sup>427</sup> Burns goes on to properly subordinate the *order* of the early church to her *life* in the Spirit.



Islay Burns (1817-72)

And, finally, she was *spiritual* and *free*. She was not so much a hierarchy as a brotherhood. She was not an outward organization, but a living society...Essentially she was a congregation (*ekklesia*), a sacred community of men and women united together in Christ, and dwelling together in a holy fellowship of faith and love. Outward forms of administration and of worship were, indeed, necessary in their own way, and afterwards received, at least in regard to their essential principles, an ample apostolic sanction; but in their nature they occupy a secondary, not a primary place. They touch not the being, but only the well-being of the Church.<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> Dunn; 559-60.

<sup>427</sup> Burns; 27

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*; 28.

### Essential Christian Worship

What does it mean for believers to worship “*in spirit and truth*”? Many reasonable interpretations have been offered in explanation, and it may very well be that the phrase is multifaceted in meaning. But it would not be unreasonable to consider the Pauline teachings of life in the church – which is itself true worship (*cp.* Rom. 12:2) – as oriented around the two foci of Jesus’ resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As the apostle also certainly considered Jesus Christ to be the full embodiment of Truth (*cp.* Eph. 4:21), it stands to reason that the concept of worship *in spirit and truth* might be rendered, *in Spirit and Truth* and be thus oriented, as Paul does, to the Person of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ and the Person of the Holy Spirit, poured out within the people of God, constituting them the Body of Christ. Practically-speaking, this may be viewed as translating into (1) the faithful preaching and teaching of the doctrine of Jesus, and (2) the edifying operation of the Holy Spirit within the community through the *charismata*. Worship *in Spirit and Truth* cannot be lacking either element.

What does this look like? From Paul’s letters we more often see the Church in error rather than as she was intended to be, and sadly this has been reflected throughout the history of the Church. But error does not negate truth in this case; it merely brings the truth into greater relief and visibility, just as the words of the prophets under the Old Covenant highlighted the truth of God’s Law in spite of the errors of God’s people. If we look carefully, we can see the right path even as Paul chastises the churches for traveling down the wrong one. There are many ways to characterize the biblical church, the church as her Head, Jesus Christ, intends it to be. We will consider four broad descriptions that flow from the Pauline letters:

- |                 |               |
|-----------------|---------------|
| 1. Distributive | 3. Edifying   |
| 2. Reciprocal   | 4. Witnessing |

By **Distributive** we mean nothing more or less than what has been the general theme of the past several lessons: that Christian worship is founded on the distribution and operation of the *charismata* among and between all believers in the community. As

we have seen, this does not mean chaos, nor does it mean that every believer will function *charismatically* in each and every assembly. The guiding principle remains edification of the body, the building up of itself in love. There is to be no grandstanding or pride with respect to the gifts, for any gift manifested from such an attitude and not from a desire to edify the community could not be said to be motivated by the Holy Spirit. We must remember that the problem in Corinth was not the presence and operation of the *charismata*; the problem was the rampant pride and faction in which the gifts were becoming sources of division and disunity. “In Paul’s mind the issue resolved itself into a matter of understanding the full correlation between the oneness of the Holy Spirit, as the source of all gifts, and the oneness of the church, as the area where the gifts were apportioned individually.”<sup>429</sup> Banks comments, “God has so designed things that the involvement of every person with his special contribution is necessary for the proper functioning of the community.”<sup>430</sup>

‘Distributive’ also speaks to the laying aside of the traditional societal and religious markers that distinguished between Jew and Gentile, slave and freeman, man and woman, in a broad recognition that God in Christ had fulfilled the prophecy of Joel 2:28-29 and had poured out His Spirit into every believer. That Spirit did and continues to distribute manifestations of God’s grace – *charismata* – to every believer without reference to these superseded distinctives as a foretaste of the consummated Kingdom yet to come. Yet we also have seen that some distinctives – or regulations, we might say – remain as a preventative to disorder and the overthrow of important relationships that would negatively impact the witness of the church in the world. For this reason each category of *charismata* finds order in the ‘office’ closely associated with it: the *presbytery* for the speaking gifts and the *diaconate* for the serving gifts. Also for this reason we see the admonition regarding order among the prophets, and the prohibition against women teaching or exercising authority over men. Paul sought to insure the continued freedom of the Spirit through the members of the body while at the same time preventing

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<sup>429</sup> Minear; 190.

<sup>430</sup> Banks; 64.

anarchy and chaos as were well on their way in Corinth. “So while the proper working of the Spirit could not be safeguarded by the creating of a fixed liturgical structure, neither was it maintained by a purely spontaneous exercise of the gifts.”<sup>431</sup>

This distributive character of true worship is seen in Romans 12, where the apostle uses the most explicit terminology pertaining to ‘worship’ in any of his letters.

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.* (Romans 12:1-2)

The phrase translated by the New King James version as ‘reasonable service’ is the Greek *logikain latreian*. The first word is from the root ‘logos,’ with which we are familiar, and is the etymological ancestor to our ‘logical,’ hence ‘reasonable.’ It follows from all that Paul has said about what God has done in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, that the believer’s ‘logical’ response will be to present himself or herself as a ‘living sacrifice.’ It is the second word that is most intriguing: *latreian* is the Greek for service, but service of a specifically religious, even *Levitical*, kind. It is not the word used for diacanal service, but rather is found in the Septuagint as “the special word for service rendered by the Israelites as the peculiar people of God.”<sup>432</sup> The word corresponds exactly with the earlier *thusian*, or ‘sacrifice,’ and undoubtedly is intended to contrast the slain sacrifice of the altar under the Mosaic and Levitical dispensation with the ‘living’ sacrifice that now constitutes each and every believer.<sup>433</sup>

These two verses have always been interpreted and applied toward individual Christian discipleship, and they do indeed have that application. However, what is often missed is the context in which Paul places the verses. First, there is the clear reference to the Levitical service of worship envisioned by the apostle’s choice of words. Second, there is the passage immediately following, which also clearly places the duty

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<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*; 108.

<sup>432</sup> Vincent; *Word Studies; Volume III*; 154.

<sup>433</sup> Moo, Douglas *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; 1996); 753.

of ‘*presenting oneself as a living sacrifice*’ within the setting of the believing assembly, the congregation.

*For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.* (Romans 12:3-8)

The reference could easily be extended through at least Chapter 14 of the letter, but these verses are selected because of their mention of the *gifts*, and specifically of the twofold categorization we have seen before: *speaking gifts* and *serving gifts*. Furthermore, Paul introduces the metaphor of the congregation as a body, something he has developed in great detail in his letter to the Corinthian church. There was no controversy in Rome, and apparently no confusion or chaos regarding the ‘gifts.’ Nonetheless, Paul reiterates here in a positive light what he taught in I Corinthians in a more negative vein. The bottom line is not whether the ‘gifts’ are causing trouble in the church, but whether the congregation is moved by the Holy Spirit in and through the ‘gifts’ that He *distributes to each individually even as He wills*. It is hardly an exegetical stretch to see the operation of the *charismata* within the assembled congregation as the manner in which God intends the *reasonable service* that Paul enjoins. Individualizing the first two verses ignores the following multitude of verses and, in fact, negates itself in so doing.

But we know from Paul’s epistle to the Corinthian church that even the operation of the *charismata* was not an ‘individual’ thing, even if it was set within the assembled congregation. The operation of the Holy Spirit through the *charismata* distributed to each believer was therefore, and consequently, **Reciprocal**. This feature of true worship is perhaps nowhere so profoundly seen as in the ‘one-anothers’ of the Pauline letters. These passages speak powerfully of the mutual benefit that each and every believer is to provide, and to receive, as part of the dynamic operation of the *charismata*. The ‘one-

another's' are the practical outworking of the edification to which every grace-gift is directed. We encountered the foundation of the 'one-anothers' in Paul's body metaphor, reiterated here in Romans 12: 5, "*so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.*" Thus Paul continues in this context, showing that presenting oneself as a 'living sacrifice' as one's 'reasonable service of worship' is impossible without reference to 'one another.' "*Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.*"<sup>434</sup> A passage roughly parallel to the thought here in Romans 12 is found in Ephesians 5, where we also find a detailed summary of interpersonal relationships within the Christian home and community.

*Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to **one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to **one another** in the fear of God.* (Ephesians 5:17-21)

Some have interpreted the last clause, *submitting to one another*, in a leveling and egalitarian manner, viewing it as another 'proof' that there are to be no distinctions whatsoever within the believing community. This conclusion follows from an incorrect hermeneutic, for the apostle immediately proceeds to describe what 'submitting to one another' will look like in the primary relationships that the believing community experiences: husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves/servants. "Paul's stress is not so much upon the *equality* of Jews and Greeks, free and slave, and men and women with one another as upon their *unity* in Christ...Paul is no advocate of a universal, classless, and unisexual society – he merely affirms that these differences do not affect one's relationship with Christ and membership in the community."<sup>435</sup>

The corporate and worship aspect of the 'one another' admonition comes to the fore in two parallel passages found in Ephesians and Colossians, two parallel letters. Much emphasis has been placed on the meaning of individual terms used – meanings

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<sup>434</sup> Romans 12:10

<sup>435</sup> Banks; 118.



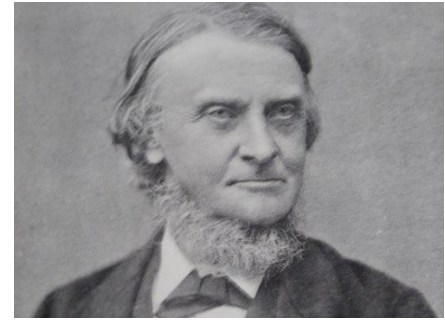
that cannot be determined with any degree of confidence – and sadly the forest has been lost for the trees. The first of these is quoted in the passage above: “*speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*” which is paralleled in Colossians 3, which we quote at length to emphasize the continued theme found throughout Paul’s letters.

*But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to **one another**, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with **one another**, and forgiving **one another**, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing **one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.* (Colossians 3:8-17)

Again, the focus on the terms ‘*psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*’ has often, and sadly, detracted from the reciprocity of the dynamic life of the Body of Christ in the local congregation. The terms may refer to different types or styles of biblical psalms, or they may refer to different types or styles of songs sung to God in praise, thanksgiving, or supplication – most conclusions on this score prove to be tendentious. Seen in the light of the common theme of ‘one body,’ and through the frequent use of the ‘one another’ so common to Paul’s letters, it should be apparent that it is the Reciprocal characteristic of true Christian worship that is at the heart of what Paul is saying, not the types of songs sung in the assembly. The root and foundation of the ‘one another’ in this passage is the indwelling Word of Christ, which is clearly something that the apostle considered available to and incumbent upon every believer so that they might properly serve their part as members of the one body. Given the similarity in images, can there be any doubt that “*letting the word of Christ richly dwell within you*” is parallel and has the

same meaning as “*being filled with the Spirit*” in Ephesians 5:18? The connection is indisputable and reinforces the fact that *charismatic* by no means negates *sound doctrine*.

In commenting on this passage in Colossians 3, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Scottish Baptist minister Alexander MacLaren highlights both the biblical necessity of reciprocity in the worship service, and the apparent lack of this in the churches of his acquaintance. He writes, “The individual possession of the word in one’s own



Alexander MacLaren (1826-1910)

heart does not make us independent of brotherly help. Rather, it is the very foundation of the duty of sharing our riches with our fellows, and of increasing ours by contributions from their stores. And so – ‘teaching and admonishing one another’ is the outcome of it. The universal possession of Christ’s word involves the equally universal right and duty of mutual instruction.”<sup>436</sup> MacLaren goes on in the same context to lament the lack of reciprocity within Christian worship, though he does not use that particular term. Let us consider words from over a century ago and realize that true worship *in spirit and truth* has been rare in the church through her history.

In what forms that principle shall be expressed, how safeguarded and controlled, is of secondary importance. Different stages of culture and a hundred other circumstances will modify these, and nobody but a pedant or religious martinet will care about uniformity. But I cannot but believe that the present practice of confining the public teaching of the Church to an official class has done harm. Why should one man be for ever speaking, and hundreds of people who are able to teach, sitting dumb to listen or pretend to listen to him? Surely there is a wasteful expenditure there. I hate forcible revolution, and do not believe that any institutions, either political or ecclesiastical, which need violence to sweep them away, are ready to be removed; but I believe that if the level of spiritual life were raised among us, new forms would naturally be evolved, in which there would be a more adequate recognition of the great principle on which the democracy of Christianity is founded, namely, ‘I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh – and on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in these days of My Spirit, and they shall prophesy.’ There are not wanting signs that many different classes of Chris-

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<sup>436</sup> MacLaren, Alexander *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Colossians and Philemon* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son; nd); 328.

tian worshippers have ceased to find edification in the present manner of teaching. The more cultured write books on 'the decay of preaching;' the more earnest take to the mission halls and a 'freer service,' and 'lay preaching'; the more indifferent stay at home. When the tide rises, all the idle craft stranded on the mud are set in motion; such a time is surely coming for the Church, when the aspiration that has waited millenniums for its fulfilment, and received but a partial accomplishment at Pentecost, shall at last be a fact: 'would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!'<sup>437</sup>

This lengthy quote brings us round to the opening thought of this particular lesson: has the undeniable 'evolution' of Christian liturgy been a positive or a negative development? Has the shift from a freer, more broadly distributed worship to a clerical, more hierarchical and controlled form contributed or detracted from the edification of the Body of Christ? Is the loss of the *charismata* in most Protestant churches something that was itself guided by the Holy Spirit, or is it rather a manifest *grieving* of that same Spirit? We have yet to deal with the last two of the four characteristics of a biblical worship service, and will have to leave these to the next and last lesson in this series. As the final two – *edification* and *witness* – are both grounded in the same motive force, which is *love*, they are a lesson unto themselves. Suffice it at this point to reiterate that, in Paul's inspired opinion, there was no such thing as a non-charismatic church. Cullmann offers this indictment of the modern church, which has not improved from MacLaren's day.

In the light of this wealth of form, we must assert here and now that the services of worship in the Protestant Churches of our own era are very much poorer, not only in respect of the free working of the Spirit, but also in respect of what is liturgical and especially in respect of what is aimed at in the gatherings of the community. The aim is constantly described by Paul as building up of the community...Although not all the elements we have enumerated were found at each meeting, nevertheless we must suppose that there were some without which such an 'edifying' (upbuilding) meeting in early Christianity was not thinkable.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*; 329-30.

<sup>438</sup> Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*; 26-27.

**Lesson 16 – Eschatological People of God – Part II**

**Text: I Corinthians 13:1-13; Galatians 5:16-25; Philippians 2:1-5**

*“The point here is that this love is of more value,  
a mark of greater maturity,  
and its effects more enduring than any charism.”*  
(James Dunn)

The average ‘man on the street,’ if asked to name a few philosophers, will most likely rattle off the ‘Big Three’ – Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. The odd person here and there would get Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, or perhaps Immanuel Kant or Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Official lists of the most influential philosophers in history will include the Apostle Paul along with Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. But none will add John, Paul, George, and Ringo to the list. These were, of course, the Beatles, and judging by the lyrics of some of their songs, they did indeed fancy themselves philosophers (to be fair, most of the songs were written by Paul McCartney or John Lennon). But the Beatles’ lyrics hardly approach the depth and sublimity of the apostle when one compares “All You Need is Love” with I Corinthians 13.

**I Corinthians 13:1-3**

*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels,  
but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a  
clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift  
of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all  
knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could  
remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.  
And though I bestow all my goods to feed the  
poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have  
not love, it profits me nothing.*

**Chorus from ‘All You Need is Love’**

All you need is love  
All you need is love  
All you need is love, love  
Love is all you need

John Lennon wrote what might be considered a companion piece to this deeply philosophical musing on the necessity of love, a song that sets the context of a world where ‘all you need is love’: ‘Imagine.’ It does not take long to recognize both the godlessness and the utter naivete of Lennon’s philosophy,

## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

Imagine there's no Heaven, it's easy if you try  
No Hell below us above us only sky  
Imagine all the people livin' for today

Imagine there's no countries, it isn't hard to do  
Nothing to kill or die for and no religion too  
Imagine all the people livin' life in peace

You may say I'm a dreamer but I'm not the only one  
I hope someday you'll join us and the world will be as one

This would certainly have been a revelation to Paul, that all he had to do to realize the blessedness he envisioned was to 'imagine' it. And it isn't hard to do, either! No, this is a lie from the pit of hell and the apostle would have called it out as such. We cannot 'imagine' the end of human struggle and conflict because we cannot 'imagine' the end of human sin. There is no argument against the critical necessity of love for the human race, and though it may be 'all we need,' it is no less distant from our grasp for that. The answer to Rodney King's plaintive question, 'Why can't we all just get along,' has always been the same: we are at enmity with God and therefore at enmity with one another. But God has abolished the first enmity through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and seeks to abolish the second through the outpouring and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, especially and foremost within the Church of Jesus Christ.

I Corinthians 13 is often referred to as 'the Love Chapter,' as love is undeniably the central theme. Sadly, however, many have interpreted the chapter through the lens of the Beatles song, concluding that all the church needs is love. The *charismata* are not needed, just love. Parallel to this is Romans 13, where Paul writes that love is the fulfillment of the Law, leading many to conclude that we have no need of law; all we need is love. But neither of these chapters are intended to remove the necessity of lawful behavior (Romans 13) or the grace-gifts (I Corinthians 13). Rather, they are to show that *without love* both the keeping of the law and the operation of the *charismata* are nothing, they are of no value and certainly of no merit. Paul does not insert this 'love chapter' in the midst of his treatise on the *charismata* in order to negate the operation of the Holy

Spirit within the congregation. He shows, rather, that unless the overarching atmosphere is one of love, even the most ‘useful’ of gifts, prophecy, is valueless. “Thus it is not ‘love versus gifts’ that Paul has in mind, but ‘love as the only context for gifts’; for without the former, the latter have no usefulness at all – but then neither does much of anything else in the Christian life.”<sup>439</sup>

Modern scholars have struggled with I Corinthians 13 in its place between Chapters 12 & 14, though most evangelical commentators are able to see the intimate connection of the middle chapter to the flow of the entire pericope. That Chapter 12 is connected with Chapter 14 no one doubts, and Paul makes it clear through his use of ‘bookmark’ words at the beginning of each chapter.<sup>440</sup> In the opening verse of Chapter 12, Paul sets out the theme of the current discussion, “*Now concerning spirituals, brethren...*” The word translated ‘spiritual things’ in most English Bibles is *pneumatikōn*, the same word then used in the first verse of Chapter 14, “*Pursue love, and earnestly desire spirituals (pneumatika).*” These two verses show that the theme of the material immediately following each is the *spirituals* or *spiritual things*; in other words, the *charismata*. But 14:1 also ties in the middle chapter where the theme was only incidentally the *charismata*, but primarily *love*: “*Pursue love...*” Paul also ties Chapter 13 back to Chapter 12, again by the use of the same word:

<i>But earnestly desire the <b>greater</b> gifts.</i>	(I Corinthians 12:31a)
<i>The <b>greatest</b> of these is love.</i>	(I Corinthians 13:13b)

The common word here is *meitzōn*, the superlative comparison term ‘greater.’ But the two phrases are not equivalent, for Paul sets out in Chapter 13 to show that love is greater than even the greatest gift. This is because without love, all of the gifts are worthless. Thus he introduces the ‘love chapter’ with a phrase that perhaps should be verse 1 of Chapter 13, instead of the final verse of Chapter 12, “*And I will show you a still more excellent way.*”

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<sup>439</sup> Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*; 197.

<sup>440</sup> We remember, of course, that Paul did not write chapters into his epistles. Individual words, therefore, provide the boundaries of discreet thoughts within the overall letter.

*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.* (I Corinthians 13:1-13)

The overall chapter can be divided into three sections, as Barrett does in his commentary, each of which shows the supremacy of love over all other things. Verses 1-3 can be encompassed under the heading, 'it is love alone that counts.' Verses 4-7, then, emphasize the fact that 'it is love alone that triumphs.' Finally, the closing verses of the chapter show that 'it is love alone that endures.'<sup>441</sup> "The point here is that this love is of more value, a mark of greater maturity, and its effects more enduring than any charism."<sup>442</sup>

The rhythm of the first 'stanza,' as it were, has convinced some scholars that Paul is using an established Christian hymn to open his remarks concerning the primacy of love. Barrett points out, however, that the overall structure is undeniably prose, and all attempts to make poetry out of the chapter have failed. Still, the apostle does utilize a progressive parallelism in the opening three verses to show that there really is nothing a believer can do, without love, that counts for anything toward God and in the Church. Paul's contrast between what one might be able to *do* and what that activity actually counts *without love* is itself a threefold parallel successively comparing *charismata*, then *miracle-working faith*, and finally *personal sacrifice* with love, and finding each woefully

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<sup>441</sup> Barrett; 299.

<sup>442</sup> Dunn; 596.

lacking in anything positive. It is important to note that at no time does the apostle denigrate the *charismata*, or *miracle-working faith*, or *personal sacrifice and generosity* in these verse, as if he were saying, ‘All we need is love.’ What he does supremely is set all Christian activity in its proper context. Love is not ‘all we need,’ but it is the *sine qua non* of all else. “Paul implies that it is all too possible to experience charism without love, and he goes out of his way to stress that charism divorced from love is useless.”<sup>443</sup> Ridderbos adds, “For it is not in the *charismata* that the church is rooted and grounded, but in love. And the *charismata* do not constitute the vital element of the body of Christ, the power that binds it together, but love.”<sup>444</sup>

*If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels,  
But do not have love  
I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal  
If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge  
And if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains,  
But do not have love  
I am nothing  
If I give all my possessions to feed the poor and deliver my body to be burned  
But do not have love  
It profits me nothing*

Underlying these comparisons is the reality that believers can function in the church in ways that outwardly are praise-worthy (and may even be doing so in order to garner that praise) but inwardly are condemned by God and by no means the effect of the Holy Spirit. *Love* is what makes the difference; all the difference in the world. But what is *love*? In offering a definition – or perhaps, better, a *description*, the apostle is really delineating the attitude of God himself toward mankind, and especially toward His people.

*Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity*

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<sup>443</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>444</sup> Ridderbos, *Paul*; 296.



## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

*uity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*  
(I Corinthians 13:4-7)

We should not think of this passage as an exhaustive definition of love, but rather one that is particularly suited to the problems encountered in the church at Corinth. Still, it is quite comprehensive in scope and sets forth a description of 'love' that is further summarized by Jesus himself in the second half of the greatest commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>445</sup> Dunn writes, "It is hard to doubt that Paul in thus describing love had in mind the love of God in Christ, and Jesus' own summary of the law in the commandment to love the neighbour."<sup>446</sup>

Fee points out that this love of which Paul speaks is not something that believers possess in and of themselves, nor is it something that they can 'whip up' as an emotion. Rather, this love is a very active – we might even say, practical – virtue that moves in and through the *charismata* as it binds the hearts of the believing community together in the Holy Spirit. Fee writes, "To 'have love' means to 'act lovingly'...And to act lovingly means, as in the case of Christ, actively to seek the benefit of someone else. For Paul it is a word whose primary definition is found in God's activity in behalf of his enemies (Rom. 5:6-8), which was visibly manifested in the life and death of Christ."<sup>447</sup> N. T. Wrights shows how 'love' is really the thread that ties all of Paul's letters – and, indeed, all of his thought concerning the Church – together.

In particular, Paul famously highlights love, the self-giving love for which he, like other early Christians, adopted the previously more general word *agape*. This character-trait is one of the three which Paul specifies as things which will last into the future world, when activities like tongues and prophecy will be no longer needed...Love also heads the list of qualities which together make up the singular 'fruit of the spirit.' It is the one thing which 'fulfills the law.' It is the means by which the entire 'Messiah's body' holds together: it is no accident that I Corinthians 12 is followed immediately by I Corinthians 13, and no accident either that the development of the 'Messiah's body' image in Ephesians 4 ends with that body 'building itself up in love.' And this 'love' is very practical. When Paul tells the Thessalonians to love one another more and more, he is most likely

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<sup>445</sup> Cp. Matthew 22:36-40

<sup>446</sup> Dunn; 596.

<sup>447</sup> Fee; *God's Empowering Presence*; 201.

not referring to emotional feelings but to practical financial help and support within the church. It is love that drives his complex and evidently somewhat embarrassing programme to raise money from largely gentile churches to give to the struggling Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem. And it is love, in the form of true *koinonia*, that he sees evident in the gift which the Philippians have send him in prison.<sup>448</sup>

Within the community, then, everything boils down to mutual and reciprocal love. “For Paul love is the most important of all the Christian graces and the very heart of Christian ethics. Motivated by the supreme expression of God’s own love in the sacrificial death of Christ, it springs from a transformed life filled with God’s own Spirit...For Paul, loving others is the single most important characteristic of the Christian life and the heart of Christian living.”<sup>449</sup> But ‘love’ has never been an easy concept to either define or apply. Paul was not a romantic; his understanding of love was at all times grounded in Christ’s love for him, as he so clearly states in Galatians 2:20, “*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*” The love of God in Christ for every believer is the foundation of the love that every believer owes to every other believer (and to the unbeliever, as well). But the vehicle, if may call it that, of that love – the motive force by which that love is, in fact, transferred – is the Holy Spirit. Again, Paul, this time in Romans:

*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because **the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*** (Romans 5:1-5)

It is not too much to say that, apart from an atmosphere of mutual love grounded in the love of God in Christ Jesus, *nothing* that is done in the name of ‘Christian worship’ or ‘Christian life’ is true and worthy. To the extent that the community lacks love, to that extent it lacks veracity, and even validity. “For without love there is no commun-

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<sup>448</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*; 1118-19.

<sup>449</sup> Hawthorne, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*; 575-76.

ion within the body, in which alone a share of Christ is to be found.”<sup>450</sup> This is, of course, a constant failing since no believer and no church is perfect. But greater still the failure of not even recognizing that love is lacking, and instead becoming proud on the basis of the multitude of loveless acts, miracles, and *charismata*. That is where Corinth was, at least, heading (if she was not already there). One can hear Paul’s echo in every such community, “*Shall I praise you? I shall not praise you!*”<sup>451</sup>

It might be useful at this point to again reiterate that the critical problem of lovelessness applies no less to the ‘doctrinally pure’ congregation or denomination than it does to the ‘spiritually alive’ charismatic assembly. It is hardly a danger that most Reformed congregations will ‘go charismatic’ in the sense of modern Pentecostalism. But it is an often-unrecognized danger that Reformed churches become Pharisaic sticklers for things like the Regulative Principle and the Doctrines of Grace, dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s, but without love. Paul was dealing with a particular problem in Corinth – the problem of an overheated *charismatic* movement – but it is fairly clear that he would write the same admonition to an unloving but doctrinally-solid (may we say, obsessed) church as he did in I Corinthians 13. Perhaps he even alludes to this phenomenon in 13:2, where he posits having ‘all knowledge’ yet without love...*I am nothing*. He certainly does in I Corinthians 8:1, “*Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.*” Yet the problem with an unloving dogmatism no more argues against striving for sound doctrine than an unloving spiritualism argues against the *charismata*. There is, perhaps, a sense in which getting the ‘love issue’ right is the important thing; all else will follow, not naturally, but spiritually.

*Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.* (Philippians 2:1-4)

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<sup>450</sup> Ridderbos; 296.

<sup>451</sup> I Corinthians 11:22

Thus Paul describes “*this attitude which was in Christ Jesus*” (v. 5) as being the fundamental atmosphere of the believing community. Paul, echoing Jesus, sees the congregation as the place where the ‘greatest commandment’ is fulfilled: *Love the Lord your God...love your neighbor as yourself*. The clearest manifestation that love is present in the community is not through either doctrine or *charismata*, as important as they are, but through mutual consideration, reciprocal love. “The application of the commandment of love consequently has in Paul the clear effect of stirring up the strong awareness in the church of mutual responsibility, of together forming a unit, and thus of pressing love into the service of the building up of the church. The church is to be a brotherhood and to live out of the consciousness of being a unique fellowship.”<sup>452</sup>

In this passage Paul also shows again that love is not merely an emotion, nor is it related to ‘liking’ someone. Speaking of love in Pauline terms, Banks writes, “Far from being a human possibility, however, it has its origin in God. Only through the Spirit has it poured out into Christians’ lives. Far from being merely an attitude toward others, it involves a purposeful act of will.”<sup>453</sup> As the primary component of the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ in Galatians 5 (one commentators submits that the balance of the list is really a commentary on ‘love’), the Spirit-filled community cannot be one that does not show love to one another. It is an atmosphere in which the *individual* fades and the *community* comes to the fore. Ridderbos again notes, “therefore Christian love is not individualistic, proudly separative, but always above everything else concerned with the body and not the individual.”<sup>454</sup> In terms of the *charismata*, then, we may reasonably conclude that one’s ‘spiritual gift’ is whatever tends toward the building up of the body, whatever one is led to do within the community that serves ‘one another.’ Love therefore is the ground from which the third essential character of a true, worshipping community grows, as well as the air that it breathes: *edification*.

The purpose of I Corinthians 13, tucked as it is in between Chapters 12 and 14, is to emphasize the meaning of the entire pericope. What is ironic about so much of the

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<sup>452</sup> Ridderbos; 294.

<sup>453</sup> Banks; 58.

<sup>454</sup> Ridderbos; 296.

interpretation of these chapters throughout church history, and especially by the ‘charismatic’ movements in church history, is that Paul really is not concerned about the *charismata* so much as he is about *love*. When he writes, “*And I will show you a still more excellent way*” at the end of his teaching on the *charismata* in Chapter 12, he means to say that no particular ‘gift,’ nor many gifts combined in any particular person, can amount to anything without love. Fee translates the superlative in this sentence as “a way that is beyond comparison,” which is an apt interpretation of the term in that Paul has thus far been discussing the relative merits of the gifts, and will continue that tack even more so in Chapter 14. Fee writes, “The way they are going is basically destructive to the church as a community; the way they are being called to is one that seeks the good of others before oneself. It is the way of edifying the church, of seeking the common good.”<sup>455</sup>

Perhaps the most famous verse from this famous chapter, I Corinthians 13, is verse 13, “*And now there abides faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*” In the context of things that ‘pass away’ when ‘the perfect’ comes, this statement can only mean that, compared to the temporal and circumstantial nature of the *charismata*, what remains and endured in the church are these three virtues: faith, hope, and love. Commentators disagree (of course) as to why ‘love’ is the greatest of the three, but the answer seems obvious: it is the only one that will abide even after the *Parousia* and the consummation of the age. If ‘faith’ is “*the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen,*”<sup>456</sup> and “*hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one hope for what he sees?*”<sup>457</sup> then it stands to reason that ‘faith’ and ‘hope’ will not be operative in the consummated kingdom, when faith will have become sight, and what is hoped for will be fully received. But ‘love’ abides, for it is the power and nature of the kingdom that the love that unites, as it were, the Godhead will prevail undiminished and without obstacle. This is why love must be the characteristic trait of God’s people in the current age, as Jesus himself stated, “*By this all men will know that you are My disciples: by your love for*

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<sup>455</sup> Fee, *I Corinthians*; 625.

<sup>456</sup> Hebrews 11:1

<sup>457</sup> Romans 8:24

*one another.*"<sup>458</sup> Minear writes, "Nothing could show more trenchantly that the one people of God is now living in the age of fulfillment. It is truly an eschatological community."<sup>459</sup> And this 'eschatological love' is manifested in the community, not by *knowledge or gifts*, but by the concern that every member has for 'one another.'

Thus the focus of many charismatics on the 'gifts,' and things like 'spiritual gift inventories' are all misled and misleading. It is to read I Corinthians 12 and 14 without Chapter 13 in between, and to misread them at that, as if the *charismata* were the theme of the passage. To be sure, the spiritual gifts are important, and Paul resumes his discussion of them in Chapter 14 by saying, "*Pursue love, and desire the spirituals,*" showing that he in no way diminishes the importance of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit *for the common good* through the *charismata*. But it is mistaken for believers to focus on the *charismata* as the end in itself as well as to think that those 'gifts' listed by Paul are exhaustive. It is rather the case that *anything* that a believer might do within the community for the common good would be considered by the apostle as a *charism*, and would applaud it. "The edification of the church became a strategic test of the authenticity of each gift. This criterion not only replaced the goal of self-enhancement and self-satisfaction, but it even reduced the importance of speaking to God to of understanding the mysteries of the Spirit."<sup>460</sup> The purpose of the *charismata* was, and remains, the edification of the community, so the manner or type of *charismata* must at all times be left to the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, who alone knows what will accomplish that purpose. "In quite an extraordinary way, therefore, the gifts have been designed by God to *encompass every aspect of the community's life*...The breadth of charismatic activity in the community is very marked indeed, and the levels at which edification can take place very diverse in character."<sup>461</sup>

We can summarize these statements regarding the apostle's perspective thus: it is more important to edify the collective body than to attain personal spiritual advance-

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<sup>458</sup> John 13:35

<sup>459</sup> Minear; 231.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*; 193.

<sup>461</sup> Banks; 103-104, italics original.

ment. We might go so far to say that what is often considered beneficial on an individual level is rendered otherwise, even detrimental, on a corporate basis because it serves no purpose insofar as edification is concerned. It appears, for instance, that Paul had a very active ‘prayer language,’ as it is called in today’s charismatic circles, but “*in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind, that I may instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.*”<sup>462</sup> In all ages, therefore, “Those who have been baptized by the Spirit into one body must zealously utilize whatever gift the Spirit had apportioned, but this necessity must be controlled by the truth that the building up of the church continues to be the overriding intention of the Spirit.”<sup>463</sup>

Edification, then, helps us understand even the role of ‘offices’ within the church. They are not established to control and certainly not to replace the *charismata*, but rather to insure that the body maintains the emphasis of mutual edification, and avoids the ever-present danger of self-aggrandizement and pride. Cullmann notes that “Paul was able to bring freedom of the Spirit and the restrictions of liturgy together in the self-same service because he saw everything in the light of the one aim: the *oikodomei* (building up of the Church).”<sup>464</sup> Thus Paul incorporates the role of ‘leaders’ with the overarching paradigm of ‘edification’ in I Thessalonians 5, written to a church, unlike Corinth, that was causing the apostle no trouble at all. Notice how his comment regarding the leadership of the church is couched between two passages dealing with the edification of the community.

*Therefore comfort each other and **edify one another**, just as you also are doing. And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the faint-hearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always **pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.***

(I Thessalonians 5:11-15)

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<sup>462</sup> I Corinthians 14:19

<sup>463</sup> Minear; 193.

<sup>464</sup> Cullman, *Early Christian Worship*; 32.

Throughout the Pauline corpus, with each letter written to individual churches but intended for the universal church of all ages, Paul weaves a consistent message of mutual and reciprocal love that manifests itself through a self-conscious edification, or ‘building up,’ of the community. He will not allow primacy within the body any more than he will allow primacy among the leaders and planters of the church (*cp.* I Cor. 3:5-7). Banks notes that a major error in interpreting Paul’s teaching regarding the church is, “the common failure to realize that, whatever Paul may say about the role of particular individuals within the community, his emphasis is on the responsibility of all.”<sup>465</sup> In light of this, we may reasonably conclude that it is not the intention of Paul for believers to grow anxious about which particular ‘gift’ they possess, much less to compare themselves and their ‘gifts’ to others within the community. Rather it is the reality that all believers *are gifted* that should motivate each individual believer to “*consider others as more important than himself.*” Thus we should not be concerned about whether we have the ‘gift of administrations’ or the ‘gifts of faith,’ etc., but should focus on the building up of the body, for it is in this attitude that the Spirit will manifest each and every believer’s giftedness, perhaps without that believer’s conscious awareness. “Thus Paul nowhere attempts to provide a systematic or full description of the gifts available to the Christian community. Indeed it is reasonable to assume on the basis of the gifts included in these lists, that any contribution by any member of the community of a constructive nature would be recognized by Paul as a gift.”<sup>466</sup>

One’s own awareness of personal ‘gifts’ has often been the central focus of modern studies on the *charismata*, and certainly the central focus of the modern ‘charismatic movement.’ It is clear from Paul’s discussion of the *charismata* that a believer can, and perhaps should, know his or her particular giftedness. Yet that knowledge pales in comparison to one’s attitude toward the body as a whole, one’s motive for exercising the spiritual gift(s) in the first place. Hence Paul seems to summarize the entire discussion of I Corinthians 12 – 14 by saying, “*Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts,*

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<sup>465</sup> Banks; 143.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*; 98.



*let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.*"<sup>467</sup> When we remember that the word 'zeal' to a former Pharisee like Paul would indicate a powerful motivation to do what God commands, and a powerful loyalty and jealousy for the integrity of the people of God (remember Phinehas), then we better understand what the apostle is striving for among the Corinthian believers and, through this letter, all believers in all ages. He does not wish to diminish their 'zeal' for spiritual gifts, but rather to accentuate their zeal for edification *through* those spiritual gifts. Fee comments on this verse, "Paul's present concern is to capitalize on their zeal, or more accurately, as before, to redirect their zeal."<sup>468</sup> It is as if the apostle were saying, "Let edification be the object of your all-too-apparent zeal, and that will set your zeal for the *charismata* in the proper channel."

This 'zeal' for edification is thus to be the over-arching characteristic of the Christian community. 'All things' are to be done for edification, with the powerful implication that 'no thing' is to be done that does not result in the building up of the community, and certainly nothing that results in its tearing down. This, in a nutshell, is Paul's ecclesiology, his doctrine of the church at the most basic and local level. This is the level where believers live, and this is the level where the world sees the 'church' in action. If that action is not mutually edifying, then the church is not being the church and its witness before the world becomes, if we may say, *blaspheming the Name of God among the Gentiles*. In other words, the lack of mutual edification within the body of Christ destroys the church's witness outside.

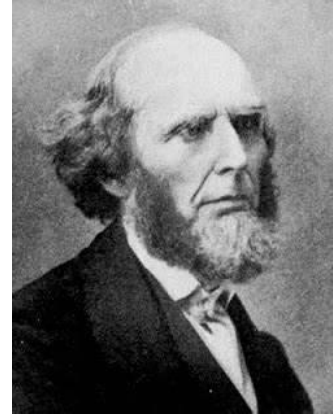
This leads us to the fourth and final characteristic of the true worshipping community: *witness*. The sad impact of Arminian soteriology, along with the effects of the Second Great Awakening and the evangelistic methods and teaching of Charles Grandison Finney, have largely co-opted the modern church's perspective on 'evangelism' in a manner that Paul would not recognize, and would not praise. Modern evangelism consists of 'sharing the gospel' with the lost and of sending missionaries into the world

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<sup>467</sup> I Corinthians 14:12

<sup>468</sup> Fee, *I Corinthians*; 666.

to ‘preach Christ.’ Neither of these activities is bad or wrong in themselves; both are praiseworthy, as are the *charismata*, but only if the church itself is present in the world as a community of love. ‘Sharing’ or ‘preaching’ Christ will, in fact, have no power beyond that of hypocrisy if the church herself is not practicing mutual edification in love. True evangelism is not grounded in the individual believer ‘sharing his testimony,’ nor is it manifested in the missionary’s



Charles G. Finney (1792-1875)

‘work’ in a ‘non-Christian’ land. True, biblical evangelism consists in the community of God’s people living as God’s people – which means living in the eschatological love of God in Christ through the Spirit – *in the presence* of the unbelieving world and culture around her. Again, the pattern was established for Israel and continues to be the paradigm of ‘witness’ for the Church.

*Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for **this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’***  
(Deuteronomy 4:5-6)

It is past time for the Church, and churches, to realize that sending out missionaries and exhorting individual believers to ‘share their faith,’ is not only evangelistically impotent when the sending church is unloving, it is hypocritical to the point of blasphemy. It is time for individual congregations to view the church as Paul did, as the eschatological people of God and, hence, as a revolutionary new community living in the midst of a dying age and a perverse generation. The apostle knew that the life of the Church would be the most powerful witness – for good or for evil – that believers could ever convey to the unbelieving world surrounding them, far more powerful than anything individual Christians might do. Notice how Paul weaves external witness into a treatise on spiritual gifts within the believing community. Having outlined (again, not

exhaustively) the *charismata* in Romans 12:6-8, he continues moving from within the community to without,

*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things **in the sight of all men**. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, **live peaceably with all men**. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore*

*"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink;  
For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."*

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* (Romans 12:9-21)

It is perhaps counterintuitive to the modern, Western mind that the Church can best reach the world by focusing on being its own community in the Spirit and in love (which is, of course, redundant). But that is both the beauty and the power of God's plan for His people – whether Israel under the Old Covenant or the Church under the New – to be a living testimony to His grace *in the midst* of the peoples surrounding them. This does not preclude going out into the world – clearly that was done in the time of the apostles and since – but it does put the emphasis on the building up of the community of faith *within* as a witness both for the grace of God and against the godlessness of the world. The Church, and local congregations, as the eschatological people of God are, corporately more so than individually, a radical new society placed in the midst of the fallen, unbelieving world. "A new society had appeared that transformed the criteria of social judgment, the bases of social cohesion, and the structures of social institutions."<sup>469</sup> By replacing all traditional social distinction and markers – Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female – with a unified body, a mutually-edifying

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<sup>469</sup> Minear; 211.

## Pauline Studies III – Life in the Church

community, God has in the Church established the foretaste of the kingdom in this present age. This is His Temple, the place where He has caused His Name to dwell. This is His New Creation in Christ Jesus, *“His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*<sup>470</sup> Evangelism happens most powerfully when the Church is what she was meant to be, and when local congregations live together through the *charismata* of the Holy Spirit providing mutual edification *“by what every joint and ligament provides.”* This is the presence of the future and this is true evangelistic ecclesiology.

In the church may be observed the present proleptic beginning of the end, when God will be all in all. The church is the first fruit of a resurrection whose power will be extended to all. The church now is the body where the head is fusing together the one new Man, a growing process in which *all* will attain ‘the stature of the fullness of Christ.’...If this body is in truth the area where Christ the head carries on his work of subjecting all things to himself, then it is in truth the cosmic ministry of Christ, a body made up of members, that is, instruments of his love for all. If we follow this order of thinking, the earlier question of whether the church as Christ’s body has an essential ministry to the world as Christ’s body is answered before it is asked. For as the body of him who is head over all things, the church exists for the purpose of an ultimate erasure of the line between church and world. It follows that church-centeredness becomes world-centeredness, because the center of both church and world is the one new Man ‘in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female.’<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>470</sup> Ephesians 2:10

<sup>471</sup> Minear; 243.