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The Unity of the Church.

A Study in Ephesians iv. 1-6.

THE dominant theme of this section of the Epistle to the Ephesians is the unity of all Christians in the Church of Christ. Throughout the letter, the assumption has been made that Greeks and Jews alike are embraced in the gracious purpose of God and are received into the Church on the same terms. That fact has already been noticed by Paul, and its theological and ethical implications drawn out. But that was not the only unity demanded, although in the early church it was the one for the recognition of which the greatest fight had to be made. The whole truth of the Christian Gospel depended upon its universality. The national distinctions which tended to cut sheer across it had to be cleared out of the way. That had already been done. But there were other methods of bringing about disunity. First of all, social distinctions began to cause trouble, and Christian preachers had to show that rich and poor were one in Christ, and that the wealthy and the high-born had no special prerogatives before God. That particular trouble comes before our notice in 1 Cor. and in the Epistle of James. Also, distinctions were made between the spiritual capacities of men, and some began to look upon themselves as being of an essentially higher order than others. The signs of this are shown even in the New Testament, but they come out more clearly in later days. Thirdly, distinction began to be made between the various spiritual gifts. Some were ranked higher than others. Instead of gifts leading to thankfulness and humility in the recipients of them, they rather led to pride and vainglory. This trouble comes before us in 1 Cor. and in this section of the Ephesian letter. Paul, however, does not keep rigidly to his subject. He branches out into the wider subject of the essential unity which should bind together all Christians in the work of the Church.

In some measure, the discussion arises incidentally. The whole of chapter iii., in spite of the extraordinary wealth of it, is an aside. It has all been called forth in exposition of a word, a word in which Paul describes himself as the bondservant of Jesus Christ for the sake of the Gentiles. After the discussion of the unity of Jew and Gentile in chapter ii., Paul evidently, to judge by iii. 1, and iv. 1, had intended to pass on by urging the Christian Church to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This phrase brought to his mind the fact that it was

not only nationality and religious tradition that kept people apart. All kinds of pride and prejudice lead to disharmony. And so once and for all, he decides to discuss the whole subject. And he does it in an extremely able and interesting fashion.

In spite of isolated difficulties, the main movement of his thought is clear. There are four stages in the argument. (1) The theme for discussion, 1-3. (2) The great unities of the Church, 4-6. (3) Spiritual gifts and their purpose, 7-13. (4) The goal towards which all Christians should be marching, 14-16.

I.

First of all, he says, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering forbearing one another in love, giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." This is simply the thesis of the passage. But there are a few points in it that are worthy of notice.

(1) The words, "the prisoner of the Lord" would have a telling effect on Paul's hearers. He is in prison. He is in prison because of his work for Jesus Christ. He believes that his persecution will lead to the furtherance of the Gospel. Moreover, he knows that one of the main reasons for his imprisonment is that he has always tried to show the union of all men in Christ. He uses his present evil position with telling effect. He does not command more than he is prepared to do himself. He has had to practice meekness and lowliness of spirit. And all through his life, he has been trying to learn the hard lesson of suffering fools gladly and of forbearing with those who opposed him. The high level of Paul's ethical teaching indicates the high level of his own moral life.

(2) There were several reasons why he should stress the particular virtues of forbearance and humility. He was wise enough to see that, so far as the relations of church members to each other are concerned, it is just those virtues that need emphasising. Nothing hinders the progress of the Christian Church so much as the inability of Christians to honour each other and to live at peace with each other. That was as true in the time of Paul as it is to-day. And the Apostle was not satisfied with being an evangelist: he was determined to be a church-builder. Also, he knew how easy it was to be spiritually proud. His hearers were possessed of many remarkable gifts, and it would be easy for them to look upon their gifts as a sign of the special favour of God and for them to lord it over their less fortunate brethren. That, in fact, is exactly what happened.

Further, there is no danger besetting the spiritual life more than the danger of subjectivism. There is a tendency to lose sight of God and to occupy ourselves with our own state of soul. It is fatally easy for the practice of the presence of God to go off into mere soul culture. And lastly, Paul had just been speaking of the grace of God and His power to do for us far more than we can ask or think. In Christ, we have received tremendous spiritual blessings and have been raised up to great honours. But our wealth is not the result of our own exertions: it is the gift of God. It is through God, and through God alone, that we are what we are. And it behoves us to be humble. The sense of the greatness and graciousness of God ought to fill us with reverence and Godly fear.

(3) Humility and meekness, patience and the forbearing of each other in love are distinctively Christian virtues. The Bible as a whole emphasises the greatness and the love of God, and calls for humility and the suppression of all pride. It is no mere negative virtue that is asked for, but rather a true estimate of ourselves and of the greatness of God. All the gifts of God to us are conditioned by our work for the community. To walk worthily of our calling and to walk in lowliness and meekness are, in Christian ethics, almost synonymous terms. In paganism, humility was not a virtue at all. The particular virtue of classical paganism was self-reliance, magnanimity, having a sufficient sense of your own importance and your own place in the world. This sprang from the deification of human nature, the lack of any real knowledge of the gracious purpose of God and the absence of the sense of sin. The only thing that kept the pagan humble was the fear of the envy of the gods. Humility, in the Christian sense of the term, depends upon three facts, (a) the recognition of the revelation of God's love in the face of Jesus Christ, and particularly the personal humility and dependence upon God shown in the life of Jesus Himself; (b) the deepened sense of sin created by our experience of Jesus Christ; and (c) the recognition of the over-ruling providence of God and of our own weakness and creaturely dependence. It is only when those three facts are all preserved that the Christian ethic of humility can be firmly established or adequately defined.

Two more points need to be noticed. (a) Humility is stressed here, not as a personal so much as a social virtue. It is only the humility that sees that all men can be gifted by the Spirit that can really build up the life of the Church. (b) Humility must spring from love. Christians must not merely bear with each other: they must forbear with one another in love. There is no virtue more easy to counterfeit than humility. It is only when it springs from love that it is pure and enduring.

(4) The Church needs many gifts. Some are more spectacular than others, some of more immediate advantage, some more profitable for the effectual building up of the Church. But all alike are the gift of God. Spiritual pride is of all pride the most contemptible. Every kind of intellectual endowment, every sort of temperament, every phase of spiritual experience, is necessary to the full life of the Church. And the Church must be ready to receive all the gifts that are thrown into its treasury without making invidious distinctions between them.

(5) One of the many remarkable things in this Epistle is the idea of the Church as a corporate unity. In his earlier letters, Paul had much to say concerning particular Churches, but the conception of the Church as a whole as one body in Christ rarely comes before us, and even then only in a tentative form. What is characteristic in Ephesians is the conception of the universal Church, the body of Christ, the divinely chosen instrument for bringing all men to God.

It is natural that there should have been delay in the development of the doctrine of the Church. First of all, for a long time, there was a close connection between the Synagogue and the members of the Church. The clear opposition between them was not seen readily. It was impossible therefore for a distinctive doctrine of the Christian Church to be built up. There was no Christian Church: there were only Christian congregations. And so, in the earlier letters of Paul, the questions that are raised deal with the duties and responsibilities of separate bodies of Christian people rather than with the wider problems of the Church as a whole. But, even in that case, in Corinthians, for example, Paul shows that he is working towards a conception of the universal Church. The local congregation is part of a great body and is urged to preserve intercourse with and to accept guidance from other local congregations. The practice of other Churches should act both as a stimulus and as a restraint upon the separate local community. It was only when the opposition between Church and Synagogue was made plain, that the way was open for the conception of the Christian Church as, in its entirety, the Body of Christ.

The delay in the formulation of the doctrine of the Church was also due to the intense way in which Paul regarded the questions of religion. When he was speaking as a Christian rather than as a theologian, the personal note was uppermost. The individual has personal fellowship with Christ. The regenerating power of God acts directly upon men, without the medium of institution or sacrament. When he is speaking in his own personal capacity, and giving expression to the realities of his own personal life, he is intensely individualistic. He is

moral and spiritual in tone all the time. It is only when he is speaking as a theologian, that he becomes an ecclesiastic and a sacramentarian. At the beginning of his ministry, his purpose was to bring men individually into saving contact with Jesus Christ, and the only theology he had was one of salvation. It was not until many Christian communities had been founded, and the need was seen of their uniting in the common task of evangelism, that the data were present for building up a theology of the Church.

Another reason which delayed the forming of a theology of the Church lay in the eschatological temper of the earliest believers. Christ was coming again soon in physical form. The evil world would come to an end and the saints would be caught up to meet the Lord. There was no call to think through the idea of the Church, since within a few years at most, there would be no Church on earth. It was only when events proved the early expectations to be wrong, and it was seen that the life of Christianity was to last much longer than had once been anticipated that the position of the Church as such began to demand attention.

There were several reasons which led Paul to lay so much stress on the Church in his later days. First, he owed a good deal to his Jewish training. The Jews had always looked upon Israel as being chosen out by divine favour to be the people of God, and through that choice, as sharing in certain privileges. At first, the Christian still remained a Jew in faith, and his Christian confession did not absolve him from loyalty to the laws of Moses. He shared in all the privileges of the historic Israel, and in addition to them, had the privileges attaching to those who believed in Christ. It was not until Gentiles were admitted into the Christian community without circumcision, and the irreconcilable antagonism between the two communities had been shown, that the Church began to regard herself as a new Israel, a spiritual Israel, possessing greater blessings even than the old. But the idea of the corporate Israel was preserved. Under the old covenant, it was only as an Israelite that the individual shared in the blessings of the covenant. The blessings belonged to the community, and to the individual only as part of the community. In Paul also, when he speaks as a theologian rather than as a man of faith, the corporation is stressed. The assembly of Israel and that of Christ might be contrasted, but in each case, the blessings are thought to be given to the assembly rather than to the individual. The Church is the Body of Christ, ruled over by the Spirit, and the Spirit cannot come to anyone outside of the Church. The power of the Spirit is shared in by all the members of the Body of Christ, but only because they are members of the

Body of Christ. That is one side of Paul, and that side depends, to a large extent, upon his Jewish training. There is another side to him, where he dares to draw upon his own experience, and it is made clear that the blessings of God are imparted directly to the individual.

The force of circumstances also led Paul to lay stress upon the Church. The communities of Christians were small, isolated and scattered. It was only as they held together that they could grow in strength or present a united front against the world. Paul particularly saw the need for them to unite in their witness. He founded the Churches, for the most part, in great cities, or in towns through which passed the Imperial Roads, so that they could be easily accessible and could keep up communication with each other. Christians early began to pass from Church to Church, and it was taught to be a duty to receive the members of a fellow Church in brotherly love and hospitality. Paul was keenly desirous of bringing the Churches together, so that they could know each other, and encourage and stimulate each other. In times of persecution and hardship, the stronger Churches were trained to give succour to their weaker brethren. Unless this was all to remain a mere haphazard kind of thing, thought was necessarily forced into the direction of the Church. By the needs of the Churches which he served, Paul was compelled to think of the Church, not as a local community of Christian men and women, but rather as a catholic society, embracing all nations and tongues, in which each separate congregation was but a member with a function to serve on behalf of the whole, ruled over by one Lord and led by one Spirit.

Another reason lay in his mystical conception of things. He looked upon Christ as being mystically present in each disciple. His intellect could not remain satisfied with that. Men and women who were themselves related to Christ must somehow be related to each other. They must be members of a mystical society. The two conceptions, when thought through, are seen to depend upon each other.

Further, Paul was forced to think in terms of the Church in the later years of his life because of the very necessities of evangelism. The idea gradually grew in his mind of making the Church the ally of the empire for purposes of law and order, and, if possible, of bringing the Empire into the Church. As yet, their inevitable antagonism was not seen. His eye swept over the whole horizon, and brought the universe under the sovereignty of Christ. And his ideal could not be realised by isolated preachers or isolated communities. It could be realised only as the separate communities joined hands, and entered upon the task of bringing the world to Christ. The Church did not

function properly when it merely sent out preachers: it must be itself a preaching Church.

(6) The Church is urged to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. One or two points call for mention. First, Paul realises that he is demanding a hard thing. He knows how prone human nature is to err. There is difficulty to overcome. But Christians must gird up their loins and overcome it. Second, they can live together in peace only as they share in one Spirit. Paul is not asking anything so otiose as that Christians should merely have a unity of mind and temper. The Spirit which is to be preserved in unity is the Spirit of God, and it is only as that Spirit is preserved in unity that there will be unity of temper and purpose. In a sense, Paul is repeating the metaphor that he had used when condemning the Christians in Corinth for their party cries. Such things are not only destructive of effective Christian work: they are a positive contradiction of fundamental Christian truth. Can Christ be parcelled out into bits? Every Christian possesses the whole Christ, but the way Christ works in the heart depends upon the individual's powers, loyalty and temperament. In the same way, every Christian possesses the Spirit of God, the whole Spirit of God, even though the Spirit can confer different blessings upon different people. Can the Spirit be dis-united or broken up? Christians must preserve the life given by the one Spirit of God by living together in peace.

II.

Then, as the second step in his argument, Paul lays down the great unities in which all Christians are agreed. "*One body and one Spirit, even as also ye 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.*"

He has already urged that Christians must preserve a subjective unity. They must put all pride and vainglory out of their minds and live together in peace. But they can do that only because they can all share in certain objective realities. In the fundamental facts of their life and faith, all Christians are at one. Let us look at the unities.

(1) There is one body. By this, of course, he means the Church. Because they are all members of one body, Christians must fulfil their function without hindering the effectiveness of any other member. This is true not only of the separate community, of which Paul is not speaking in this particular place: it is true also of the whole Catholic Church, consisting of all that are in Christ. The Church as a whole cannot carry out effectively the age-long purpose of God unless every member is

living out his life completely and every separate community is doing its duty properly.

Two or three points in this conception of the universal Church as the Body of Christ must be noticed. (a) It has not been without preparation in the earlier epistles of Paul. In 1 Cor. xii., where he is dealing with the various spiritual gifts, he lays down the principle that all gifts are from the same Spirit, and that they must be used for the edification of the Church as a whole. For the Church is a body, and each member has a function to serve in the body. Here he is thinking especially of the local community. Christians are urged to use their powers for the benefit of the local Church. In Rom. xii. 3-5 it is also clear that he is still thinking of the local community as a body. It is only in Ephesians that the Body is conceived of as embracing all Christians, and it is also here only that the close unity between the Body and the Head is adequately defined.

(b) We must notice the depth of meaning put into the word "Body." The unity of a body could mean many things. It might mean such a unity as is found in the British Empire, the unity of many nationalities sharing allegiance to a common Emperor. Or it might mean the unity of a corporation, a body of men who have come together for one definite object, and who unite only for the particular purpose for which the corporation exists. Or it might mean the unity of a family or a race, all sharing in the same blood, and all springing from the same ancestor. Or it might mean the unity of a human body, knit together as one whole. There is no doubt whatever that it is the last unity that provides Paul with his metaphor. That is made clear from verse 16, if from nothing else. The Church is one because it shares a common life, because the same blood flows through its veins, because pulsating in it is one heart, and because directing it is one head. The Church is one, not only in temper and aim and disposition: it is one in nature, in the essential qualities of life. Apart from the body, an amputated leg is not really a leg. And apart from the Church, a Christian is not really a Christian. He is separated from the living body.

(c) There can be only one body. That follows from the very nature of the symbol. A man cannot have two bodies. And there cannot be two bodies, each of which is the Church of Christ. There are certainly local communities, each separately a body, but they are all members of the universal Church, which is the only real body. They live by the power of the same Spirit. And they have flowing through them the same blood. Paul never envisaged the day when there would be separate bodies of people, each calling themselves the Church of Christ. Unity was to be preserved, certainly not by external government, but rather

by a unity of spiritual life, but the unity was to be bodily as well as spiritual. Just as the same human heart cannot beat in two human breasts, so the Spirit cannot dwell in two bodies of people, each calling themselves the Church. Paul would never have grasped the idea of a spiritual unity which could be contrasted with a corporate unity. He is not speaking about unity of aim or using figures of speech carelessly. He is speaking about unity of life, a body of people being essentially part of the same whole because they depend for their life upon the same Spirit. The Body and the Spirit are bound up together in his ecclesiology just as body and soul are in his anthropology.

(d) It is quite a mistake to look upon Paul as giving warrant for the modern fictitious distinction between the visible and the invisible Church. Christians here and now are members of the Body of Christ, here and now are made alive with Christ and made to sit with Him in heavenly places. Moreover, they are in fellowship with Christians who have died and gone to live with Christ. Paul's whole conception forbids us to confine the word Church to those who are now living on earth. His idea cannot be adequately grasped until we realise that he regarded all Christians now living on earth, and all those who had ever lived, and all those who ever would live, as all members of the Body of Christ.

(e) It is in the light of this ideal that we shall understand the scorn with which Paul looked upon the discussion concerning spiritual gifts. The body has many members, and all have not the same office, but the body cannot do its work properly without the aid of every single member. They are all honourable and necessary. In exactly the same way, the humblest Christian has his place in the whole body, and the gift with which he has been endowed by the Spirit is valuable and necessary. Christians must all realise the necessity of all the rest if they are to have a proper sense of human values or a lowly opinion of themselves.

(2) There can be only one Spirit. There is no need to discuss that point at all. It is bound up with monotheism.

(3) "*Just as ye were called in one hope of your calling.*"²⁴ Christians share one calling and one hope. They were all predestinated from the very beginning of time to share in the object that God had for the universe. They may be different in their outlook and endowments, but all alike are called by the one God, are being fashioned by the same purpose, and are being moulded to play their part in the completed Church. As yet the goal lies in the future, but because God's hand is in it all, the ideal will not fail to be realised.

(4) The real foundation of Christian unity lies in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The figure of the body must be kept in mind.

The members must keep attached to the body if they are to keep alive and do their work. If once they are cut off from the body, they will die. In the same way, the body as a whole is vitally attached to the head. Christ is not head of the Church in the sense of President or King or Father: He is head of it in the same sense as the head of a man is part of the body. The same living blood is flowing through both. But the symbol must not be pressed too far. In the human frame, the body is not a body without the head, but neither is the head a head without the body. It is not thus with the Lord and the Church. The Church is bound up with Christ, but Christ is not bound up with the Church. He can exist apart from it: it cannot exist apart from Him. Moreover, He is Saviour, Judge, and moral authority. He is outside the body as well as part of it.

(5) Christians share in one and the same faith. It is hard to interpret this exactly. It may mean creed, although that is doubtful, seeing that Paul never seems to give that meaning to the word. It is so used, of course, in the Pastoral Epistles, but they cannot be taken, at least in their entirety, as Paul's. Or it may mean the subjective act by which the Christian seizes Christ, the response of the individual in love and loyalty and trust. This is the sense that Paul generally gives to the term, but it hardly suits here. He is enumerating the great objective unities and it is hardly likely that in the middle of that one list, he would mention the one subjective unity. It may be, of course, that he means that all Christians have to respond to God in the same way, by faith, and that there are no special prerogatives for special persons. But he surely does not mean that. He seems rather to be thinking of the blessings coming from God to men *ab extra*. What he probably means here is that all Christians share in the same Gospel, the same call to redemption through the work of Jesus Christ. It is not a creed that he is stressing or the response to grace, but the redeeming facts themselves.

(6) The sixth unity is baptism. There is only one rite administered and it is administered to all in the same way. There are many doubtful questions relating to the New Testament doctrine of Baptism. There is much discussion concerning its precise origin. There is even more concerning its rationale. But in several points there is solid agreement. Paul has ample justification for his statement that the catholic Church has one and only one baptism. (a) Whatever be the precise formula recited over the baptized person, baptism was invariably administered in the name of Jesus Christ, and whatever benefits accrued from baptism came through the power of Jesus Christ. (b) Baptism emphasises the union of the baptized person with the dying and risen Christ. It has no magical power. Neither

is it a mere rite. It is a means of grace. It has re-creating power. It marks the moment when the Spirit is imparted to the believer. It unites him with the Church. (c) Baptism does not act *ex opere operato*. It is operative only when the recipient responds to the grace of God revealed to him in baptism. (d) Baptism is confined to believers and it is the indispensable means by which all believers enter the Church. (e) It seems that immersion was the general custom in the New Testament period. In any case, it was certainly the ideal, and was adopted, partly, perhaps, as a continuation of Jewish custom and partly because of its suggestive symbolism. But we have not sufficient evidence at our disposal to settle the question. Probably, where circumstances made it advisable, some other method was adopted. By the second century, the custom had changed somewhat. *Baptizo* must not be pressed too far. In Lk. xi. 38, it obviously cannot mean immersion. But, in the main, we can say that the attitude of the Church to baptism was uniform in the Apostolic period. It was one of the objective realities in which all shared.

(7) The last of the great unities lies in the fact that all Christians worship the same God, and through Christ enter into the knowledge of the same Father. His sovereignty is absolute. He is over all and in all and through all. We are all living under His mighty care and sovereign control.

Much discussion has been raised because of the omission of the Lord's Supper from the list of the unities. It has even provided a minor argument in the minds of some against the Pauline authorship of the Epistle. The difficulty is increased by the fact that in 1 Cor. xiv. 17, where, although at that particular point, he is not arguing in the cause of Christian unity, Paul speaks of the Lord's Supper as binding all those who participate in it into a corporate unity. It can hardly be that he has omitted mention of it in Ephesians because he is growing indifferent to it or as a silent protest against the sacramentarianism which was creeping into the Church. The explanation of the omission, if one be demanded, probably lies here. All that Paul is pleading for is that Christians should preserve unspoiled their harmony in the one Church, the Body of Christ. He is not addressing different local communities so much as different individuals. In later days, the Lord's Supper was a bond of unity between different Churches. But ecclesiastical development had not yet gone that far. All that is asked for is that individual men and women should dwell together in peace. And their unity has already been sufficiently assured sacramentally by baptism. It is baptism and not the Lord's Supper which incorporates believers into one body and imparts to them the one Spirit.

III.

After defining the great unities of the Christian life, Paul proceeds to the third point in his argument and mentions some of the gifts granted to believers by Christ. "But unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, when he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. Now this, he ascended, what is it but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same as he that ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. And he gave some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ, till we all attain unto the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of God, unto a full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The quotation from Ps. lxxviii. makes the argument of Paul unnecessarily obscure. His main point is that each member of the Church has his own appointed function, and his function comes to him by the grace of God. It is a pity that the main argument is deferred by the statement that the spiritual endowments of Christians are the fruit of the historic life of Jesus. It adds nothing to the force of the argument.

We have access to certain objective realities. They are not reserved for a select few. Neither are spiritual gifts reserved for a select few. Individuality is not destroyed by the Christian religion. We need the consecration of all our powers to Christ if they are to come to their highest, and we need the consecration of the powers of every single member of the Church to the service of the main body if the Church is to witness as it should.

(1) First, Paul states the principle that every member receives the grace of Christ. When speaking of his own calling to be the apostle of God to the Gentiles, he calls it the grace of God. It was through the free, undeserved grace of God that he of all men was chosen out to preach the Gospel to the heathen. And so when he preached, it was not as a self-elected apostle or as a man commissioned by men: he came with the authority of a heaven-sent messenger. The grace of God laid upon him a command to which he must respond and gave him a Gospel to which others must listen. But he had no monopoly of the grace of God. Other men had gifts and they had behind them the same authority. They must respond to the command and others must listen to the message. The gifts are vastly different, but they are all given according to the abilities of the recipient and the loving wisdom of God. They are all necessary for the full life

of the Church. They are granted to us according to the purpose of Christ. We can thankfully use whatever gift we have without chafing because we lack gifts that others possess. So much for the general principle. Then Paul goes into detail. He specifies some of the gifts.

(2) Two points are to be noticed first. The emphasis is to be placed on *He*. All Christian workers, whatever their precise gift, receive their authority directly from Jesus Christ. The whole Christian ministry is a divine appointment. Secondly, it must be noticed that Paul lays down no law as to how the grace of God is given in any special instance. In his case, it was given unmistakably, direct from the hand of Christ, at the moment of conversion. But it could hardly be that he looked upon all members of the Church as receiving the same unmediated, unmistakable, call. In fact, we know that he did not, seeing that he appointed men himself to take the oversight of the Churches he founded. We know also that it was the custom of the Church to select men to do special work. But it was no purely human choice, based upon abilities, qualifications, testimonials, and so forth. It was assumed that the Spirit had already made a choice, and the sole task of the assembly was to find out by certain spiritual exercises who it was that was manifestly chosen by the Spirit, and to support the choice of the Spirit by the authority of the Church.

Paul mentions the four chief kinds of spiritually gifted men.

(a) First, the apostle. The precise significance of the apostolic office in the early Church is doubtful. The word is capable of very wide meaning. But in the New Testament period, it seems, in the main, to have been confined to a small body of men who possessed special qualifications. The apostle must really have seen Jesus, have companied with him from the baptism of John until the time of the Ascension. And the most important element in his knowledge was knowledge of the Risen Christ. The apostle was a messenger of Jesus Christ. He must be able to speak at first hand of what he had seen. Further, the Church could not appoint an apostle: it could only decide whether the appointment had been made by Christ. The apostle must be able to present his credentials direct from Christ. Further, he must possess the signs of an apostle. It is this particularly that has caused discussion. Probably what is meant is that the apostle possessed a spiritual gift which enabled him to work miracles and to preach with such power as to put his call beyond question. So far as his work was concerned, he had to preach the Gospel among the nations and to found Churches over which he exercised authority in the name of Christ. He had a roving commission and was not bound to one spot.

(b) The prophet ranked high among the officials of the Church. He was gifted in an outstanding fashion with ability to unfold the will of God. He had eloquent utterance. He could unfold the future. He could interpret the great mysteries of God.

(c) We are in great doubt about the exact work of evangelists. But they were probably an order of preachers, subordinate to the apostles, who worked, generally in the company of an apostle, in the task of preaching the Gospel and of founding and organising Churches. They seem to have given instruction in the facts of the Gospel, and to have prepared the ground for pastors and teachers, who were appointed only when the Church was fairly established. But the important thing is that they were charismatically endowed, although we do not know the precise nature of the endowment.

(d) The last official mentioned is the pastor and teacher, for these two names apply to one office. His work was to explain the facts of the Christian revelation, and to unfold the hidden meaning of Scripture. He possessed authority over the Churches to which he was appointed, for unlike the men in the first three classes, he had no roving commission. He was responsible for the conducting of public worship and was expected to keep watch over the moral and spiritual health of the flock committed to him.

After enumerating these spiritual gifts, Paul defines certain principles of great importance.

(1) The gifts are all gifts of the Spirit. Before any man in the early Church was allowed to take part in the public work of the Church, he had to show that he was spiritually endowed. That does not mean that liberty to take part in public work was confined to an order of officials. No such thing was known. All men and women, whether officially appointed or not, could give expression to what their hearts prompted them to express. But it was only in so far as the message was from the Spirit that it was allowed. As a mere man, no one had the right to speak. As a man gifted by the Spirit, he had an unlimited right. And let it be said, the Apostolic Church seems to have been gifted to a remarkable degree with power to discriminate between the spurious and the real. The Spirit must not be confined, that is the first point. The speaker must show that he had a message from the Spirit, that is the second.

(2) Through the exercise of spiritual gifts, the full ministerial efficiency of the Church must be built up. The gifts are for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministering. Every worshipper was considered to be spiritually endowed. And the way had to be kept open for each to exercise his gift. The longer the Church was in being, the more was it seen that different needs called for satisfaction. Every endowment was

from the Spirit, and they were all necessary for the adequate building up of the Church.

(3) Gifts must be used only in so far as they are for the edification of the brethren. The Spirit does not endow men for their own benefit but for that of the whole. No matter how much an individual Christian was thought to be possessed of marvellous powers, he was not allowed to exercise them in the Church unless it was seen that they had bearing upon the spiritual life of the community.

(4) Each member is to find his place in the perfect Church. Then all his powers, by the free expression of them and by the exercise of the judgment of the Church upon them, will have been raised to their highest point. And through the united action of a body of saints, each with his gifts trained to the finest degree, the Church will attain to the full knowledge of the revelation of God in Christ, and will hold in itself all the totality of the divine manifestations in Christ.

It is now necessary to trace our steps back a little. In the middle of his argument, Paul has quoted from the Book of Psalms. It does not seem to have much bearing upon his main idea. I will summarise the main conclusions about it. The quotation is introduced in a quite indiscriminate way. But evidently Paul looks upon it as giving Scriptural authority for his own statements. It is from Ps. lxxviii. Paul's words differ considerably from both the Hebrew and LXX. Following some Targum probably, Paul changes the original so as to describe the conqueror as distributing the spoils of war as largesse to the people. The Psalm was written in celebration of some great victory. The precise historical circumstances are not clear. Paul asserts the continuity of the historic life of Jesus with the eternal life of the Ascended Christ. Through the success He gained in His earthly life, Christ gained the power to apportion gifts to His followers.

IV.

So far as translation is concerned, verses 14-16 are among the most difficult in the Epistle:—"that ye may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things unto Him, which is the Lord, even Christ, from whom all the body, fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love." This adds little to the preceding verses. I

shall content myself with dealing briefly with a few difficulties.

(1) The final goal of the Church's activities has already been amply interpreted. Here the co-ordinating of the various members in the full life of the Church is explained by the marvellous arrangements of the members of the physical body. Every member must do its work if the body as a whole is to be perfectly healthy.

(2) Paul protests against those who are willing to remain "babes in Christ." Christians must learn to think for themselves, listen to the admonishings of teachers evidently appointed by the Spirit, turn a deaf ear to uninstructed and careless teachers, and take part with the rest of the Church in the endeavour to establish divine truth. Without this, the Church cannot grow into maturity.

(3) We have the picture of the criminal carelessness of many religious teachers of Paul's day, men who had not thought deeply upon the questions of life, and who were not under the guidance of the Spirit, yet professing to teach, and by their specious eloquence, leading many astray. But the authorities were keenly alive to the danger, and to counteract it, brought in an order of teachers who really knew the reason of the faith that was in them, and showed evident signs of being under the control of the Spirit. It is only sane and instructed Christian people, who are robust in their moral life, and honest and diligent in their study, reverent in their teaching, and spiritually alive, who can at any time deal adequately with the specious philosophies that threaten the life of the Church.

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