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SPIRITUAL LIFE and SPIRITUAL GIFTS

(I Corinthians)

Part 1

I would not have You Ignorant

In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul authoritatively sets out much truth about the Spiritual Man. Although it is a letter of rebuke and correction, wherein he criticises, condemns and passes sentence upon sin and wrong behaviour, it also contains much edifying instruction. The apostle's finest treatise upon the gifts of the Spirit and their function in the Church is written here, lovingly spoken of in chapters 12, 13 and 14, and related to worship and Church order.

Reading this section with the phrase, 'now concerning (the) spirituals brethren I would not have you ignorant', he ends it with, 'let all things be done decently and in order'. Challenging them to test their spirituality by their response to these commandments of the Lord (14:37) he leaves the Corinthians no alternative but to believe that they were absolutely ignorant if they did not acknowledge divine authorship and authority for the statements they were reading. This strong approach and outright challenge was necessary at that time because the church was no longer spiritual, but carnal.

The Corinthians had been spiritual for a time, but allowing sin to intrude and be openly practised among them, they became unspiritual: as a result they speedily lost their appetite for truth, and eventually all fundamental matters of spiritual life failed.

By the grace of God and at the request of some person or persons at Corinth, Paul wrote this letter to the church there in order to rectify the position. That he succeeded in his aim is clearly shown by the nature and tone of the second letter he wrote to them some time later. Spiritual men everywhere will mourn that the need ever arose for such stern warnings and firm correction, but we may be grateful to our all-wise God that He ever moved the apostle to write the epistle. By His overruling it has come into our hands, bringing a vast treasury of needful truth, which we would not otherwise have known, and yet which we have need to assimilate. In no realm is this more so than in relationship to the gifts of the Spirit.

Concerning the Spirituals

Originally Paul called these 'the Spirituals', a fact which should be of great significance to us. Many other things spoken of in scripture are of equal importance with these, and some of far greater importance both to God and man, but only these are especially called Spirituals. Upon thought it is indeed most curious that Paul should speak of things without life or personality as being Spirituals. That the Holy Spirit should take up an adjective and seemingly turn it into a noun when speaking of things which are abstract is strange indeed, and rightly understood must be of great significance. We ought therefore to seek out the reason for this, that we might the better enter into all truth.

In order to arrive at some understanding of God's design, and come nearer to the meaning of original apostolic thought, it would perhaps be better if instead of the word 'gifts' in verse 1, we allowed the insertion of some other word such as 'ministries' or 'functions' or 'operations', and noted also that the word 'spiritual', although written in singular form here, is numerically plural in its Greek form as above shown.

If this suggestion be allowed, and we substitute one of the above alternative words for the word 'gifts', we could arrive at 'spiritual ministries' or 'spiritual operations'. This would result in the emphasis being shifted from the impersonal ability, referred to by the word 'gift', and placed upon the human element necessary to the use of the gift, which is where it rightly belongs. To do this will in no way impair truth but only enhance it, as

we shall see.

Upon examination, this slightly different emphasis will be found to be entirely in keeping with the spirit of the whole passage, which is more a treatise on the body of Christ than a mere listing of the gifts of the Spirit. Of itself a gift is neutral and inanimate, having no power either to be or to do evil or good. When the gifts were originally bestowed by God they were pure, and intended by Him to be instruments for good. Rightly held and used, any gift of God is a means of applying or implementing the power or word of God according to His will.

God meant it unto Good

As an illustration of this we may refer to the natural Creation. In the beginning God created all things after the counsel of His own will. At the conclusion of each day of creative energy, He saw and said with approval that 'it was good'. However, as we all know only too well, much of what was created originally good is now fallen into such wrong and sinful usage, that it is now an instrument unto evil. All could still be good if still used as God designed, but history has proved that use determines effects. Because of sin and the human element involved, that which was created originally perfect and powerful for good only, is now potentially instrumental for either good or evil.

When God finally made Man, and placed him over all creation, it was complete and pronounced by Him to be 'very good'. But when man by sin became fleshly instead of spiritual, he became less than 'very good'; on the contrary he became very evil. In consequence, as may be expected, the gifts he possessed also became less than 'good' in use also, and were soon employed for evil, fleshly purposes.

So it is also with the Spirituals now. Once bestowed, what matters most about a gift is the life of the person possessing it and the way it is used. Its power and effectiveness will depend entirely upon the quality of the person. It will be discovered that ultimately only the proper use of the gift will warrant the literal description 'spiritual'. Because in the beginning it was bestowed by the Holy Ghost, its classification may be 'Spiritual', but sadly enough, in common with many other things also originally given by Him, its function may be quite carnal. In this case both the benign intent of the Giver and the good effects its user may hope to achieve are nullified.

The Man is the Gift

Upon consideration it may therefore be better to omit from the translation all additional words, and read as follows: 'Now concerning the spiritual, brethren, I would not have you ignorant'. Because the masculine or feminine gender is absent from the Greek text, it may not be strictly correct to imply this meaning, but inferentially the whole epistle supports this view. If this be allowed, it will be found to place the emphasis upon brethren, where it ought to be, and not on gifts, however gifted those brethren may be.

This may well be the better way, for such a rendering is in harmony with the wording of the challenge laid down at the end of chapter 14, which reads 'if any man think himself to be spiritual', and not 'if any man is sufficiently spiritually gifted'; in the final analysis the man is the gift, not the gifts the man has. Be that as it may, we must understand that spiritual gifts are provided by God to be used by spiritual persons only. But although this is so, we must not think that gifts make a person spiritual: on the contrary it is rather to be understood that it is the person who makes the gift spiritual. The gift

is given to him to be: (1) an instrument of God's power, (2) a declaration of the spiritual quality of his own life, and (3) for the extension of his ministerial usefulness,

Years that the Locusts have Eaten

It is a regrettable fact that some people do not appear to receive or function in spiritual gifts until a long time after they are baptised in the Holy Spirit. This condition may be thought to have much to recommend it, because it allows time for development and maturity in other important areas of spiritual life. However, it is really a great pity, for had these dear people but known or been desirous of it, God's design was that they should have received the gifts at the time of regeneration, or at least very shortly after. There can be little doubt that such is God's intention, for although nowhere in their writings do the New Testament authors actually say that this is so, it is the plainly revealed scriptural pattern, beside which it is also most

commendable, both to reason and observation. The truth is that God gives gifts unto babes.

However, the New Testament writers, except in a few notable verses, speak rather more of receiving the gift of the person of the Holy Spirit than about receiving the gifts of the Spirit. They refer to the gifts as they ought, but evidently have them in true perspective. As a whole the New Testament scriptures reveal a Church baptised in the Holy Spirit, emerging from the death and resurrection of Christ, full of faith, overflowing with love, perfecting (their) holiness, replete with spiritual gifts, moving in power under the anointing of Christ their Head, complete in Him.

It is a distinct pity that so many dear brethren, of varying degrees of spiritual growth and stature, either do not receive and function in any spiritual gifts at all, or receive them very late in life. Worse still, it amounts to a shame that, with so many, this happens after years of complete indifference to them. This being so, a whole glorious realm of further spiritual usefulness and fuller development has been lost to them.

It is so sad and so altogether needless that such a state should be; indeed it is tragic, even paradoxical. However great may have been their holiness of life, love of truth and zeal for Christ throughout the years, these people have nevertheless forfeited what God has provided for them. By this willing ignorance or deliberate unbelief they have lost so much that ought to have been theirs. Without exception all who have done this have withdrawn from and irretrievably lost vast realms of understanding, power and usefulness to God and man.

This has all been because of such needless neglect on their part, for contrary to what they may have believed, he who has gifts does not thereby forfeit holiness. The gifts are instruments of applied love, and by them a man gains opportunity to perfect holiness to a fuller degree in wider realms of responsibility, as Paul points out in the second epistle he wrote to the Corinthians. Perhaps even more pitiable than the loss in functional usefulness, is the fact that all such have lost the opportunity, given only in this life, of helping to build up a local church in the way intended by God, and revealed to us by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles and by Paul in his epistles.

The Incomparable Church

As we know, Luke was a Gentile converted to Christ, and Paul was a Romanised Jew, brought up amid Gentile culture. In their writings both present a Church emergent from Jewish beginnings into Gentile fullness, moving unto its consummation as the whole Israel of God in the New Creation. In process of this they reveal its growth through and out of the form of neo-Judaism into which it early developed, and for a while remained in perilous uncertainty. Paul especially tells us what the true Church should be; Luke shows us what it then was. Through them we see what it should now be, and continue to be, throughout the entire age 'until the fullness of the Gentiles be brought in'.

So it is that in this Corinthian letter Paul sets out a form of worship and function which must surely be acknowledged as the only officially inspired form of Church worship and order on record. Therefore, however spiritual one may be, to have spent one's life establishing or building up a church to function in any form or order other than this must surely have been misspent labour. In many respects the Church is like God, and partakes of His nature, so that the same kind of things that are said of God may be said also of the Church. For instance, concerning Himself, God says that there is none other God but He, nor was there any before Him, nor any like Him, nor is there any beside Him. All this may be said also of the Church, for like its Creator it is unique; there is none other like it, nor beside it, even as there was none before it.

Taking up the point that there is none like it, it must be conceded that any attempt to create a Church which is anything other in manifestation than what God instituted is unwarrantably human, and totally misguided. How can any other way be other than man's way if it be not according to God's way? It cannot be better than this, so if it be different from it, it certainly cannot be equal to it either. However faint a representation of the original it may be, any church which at least attempts to function according to this revelation must surely be of the right order, even if for some reason it be not quite of the same Spirit or of equal power.

Ye are Yet Carnal

When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church it was yet carnal. To take a censorious view, we may say that the

general spirit within it was wrong. It was functioning wrongly; its behaviour was wrong; its power had gone, so had its purity and unity; in fact almost everything seemed somehow to have gone awry. But although its original order had at that stage become disorder, at least its way or method of worship was more or less right. Paul had to rebuke and eradicate many things from it, but not all; some things only needed correcting, reshaping and regulating. These included this form of gathering and worship, which had sprung into being under his leadership.

The apostle does not plainly say that this is the only form and function of church gathering and worship acceptable to God, but this is obviously the one laid down by the Lord, or else why the challenge in 14:37? It cannot be demonstrated from scripture that any other than this is disapproved of God, but even so it is surely unsafe to presume that anything other than this most natural order is commended of God. Paul must have written this for the purpose of setting before all hearts God's highest and best.

Man's aesthetic preferences or traditional forms or any of his likes or dislikes are not the criteria upon which choices may be made and church systems or forms of worship developed. To persist in one's own choices upon the flimsy grounds of personal preferences, when they are so plainly contrary to this inspired pattern, must surely bring God's disapproval. What God has set forth about any matter is always the ultimate perfection. Beside this, what is written here is the command of an apostle who for himself counted all things but dung that he may win Christ.

In order to accomplish this ambition, Paul was specially harsh against the things which were either religiously, racially or aesthetically gain to him (Philippians 3). He ever pressed toward the mark for the high calling of God, and being so with him, it must also be the standard of life for the entire Church. He knew that the things he wrote were, and still are, the only way, the only right way for the Church.

The Church — His Body

We may be sure then that Paul delivered to us the correct forms of Church worship and gathering and function. Whatever may be assumed otherwise is neither of inspiration nor of apostolic instruction. Therefore to be both biblical and spiritual a church must function according to the form of gathering, worship and ministry outlined in chapter 14. In any locality the church, whenever it gathers, must be a true expression, if not the fullest replica, of the person of Christ. It is precisely for this reason that the Holy Spirit has outlined this order for us.

Christ still wishes to function in His Body the Church on earth in this same gloriously simple way, but this is totally impossible except by means of the gifts faithfully recorded by Paul for our information in chapter 12. There can be no doubt that the Lord intends every one of these gifts to operate today. The same perfect love in which He ever abode and worked among men still fills His heart. It is no surprise then that in chapter 13 He majors upon this love, for the gifts are meant to be the expression of that love. Being properly held and used, they are the highest form of worship, the greatest means of service and the most patent expression of self-sacrifice of which the Church is capable, apart from martyrdom.

Diversities of Gifts — One Spirit

Now the phrase 'gifts of the Spirit' is nowhere to be found in the Bible. That this is so in no way invalidates its use; but knowledge of this fact should serve as a spur to us, making us diligently search the scriptures to find out exactly what is said about the gifts by God, Who is the Source of both gifts and scriptures.

Approaching this particular section, we are introduced to the subject in verse 4, 'there are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit'. Regretfully it must be said that although in every other realm this is manifestly true, upon entering the churches, the men spoken of in 12:23 may remain unconvinced that in things spiritual this is really so. All too often in many churches where the gifts are in use, any diversion from monotony is in volume of noise and not in variety of manifestation. Oh, when shall we learn that noise is not power?

Following on from this introduction, we are told in the next two verses that there are differences of administrations and diversities of operations. Then in verse 7 we are brought back from the plurality of diversities, differences, gifts, administrations and operations, to the singular 'manifestation of the Spirit', which we are told is given to every man for mutual profit. Proceeding to the following verses, we come upon a detail

of nine things which can only be described in the abstract as 'gifts of the Spirit'. Going still further, we find that this list is immediately backed up by a verse telling us that the Spirit who gives these gifts is the selfsame Spirit who divides them as He will between members of the body, and further still, having done so, personally works them through each member.

The truth we need to recognise here is brought out grammatically by the use of the singular and the plural: the one and selfsame Spirit is the person who works the many gifts. We thereby learn that persons who have received gifts must not work them themselves, but recognise that they are to be held as direct enablers only. They are special and precious and have been gratuitously distributed by the Spirit to members of Christ whose body we are. This He does so that by these the Lord can at any time He chooses work just as He will, through whom He will, by whatever gift He will.

(We are) Baptised into Him

Viewed in the light of information supplied in verses 12 and 13, this all seems natural and quite normal. The Church is seen to be nothing less or other than the manifestation on earth of the spiritual counterpart of the body of Jesus of Nazareth. At present it is being indwelt and used by Him in the same way as that past body of flesh and blood was indwelt and used by Him then. Though not in a literal, identical manner, nevertheless in the same sense as His physical body was but one and yet was a unity of many easily distinguishable members, so also is the spiritual body of the person of Christ.

Membership in His body is synchronous with our initiation into His life and takes place when we are baptised in Holy Spirit. For this reason baptism in the Spirit is absolutely necessary for each one of us. In that Spirit we are immersed by Jesus Christ into actual membership of His spiritual body, with a distinct individual function readily understood by all.

However, far more importantly than this aspect of the Baptism, at the same time we are each one individually baptised into the spiritual person of Jesus Christ. This is accomplished in us only because when baptising us, He also causes us to drink into one Spirit. Seeing that the body is His body, it follows that the Spirit we drink into can be no other than His Spirit. It certainly cannot be anyone else's, for there is only one spirit per person and body: that is why a body can only be one person's body.

As upon being baptised into the body of Christ a person becomes a member of that body, so it is also that upon being baptised into the person of Christ, a person becomes alive with the Spirit of Christ. By such means and only by them can a person become a functional, living or life-member of Christ. At our spiritual baptism we go into the person of Christ for life and into the body of Christ for function. Obviously it is at this time that a person becomes Spiritual, for all is of and in and by and for and from the Spirit. Because this is so, it must be the actual time of spiritual birth, for how can it be anything other?

One Body — Many Members

Now at the time of birth a babe, having been perfectly formed in the womb, is born complete. Every member of its body is in its correct place, precisely shaped and fitted for its later use in relationship to the whole body according to the need or will of the person to whom it belongs. As an illustration of this we will speak about one member of the body — the hand — and will do so as an example of what might be said of each according to its own particular place and function in the body.

By its very position, structure and function, the hand, with its many joints, palm, fingers and thumb is admirably fashioned and perfectly suited to the multiple use to which it may properly be put later in life. In so far as its form is concerned, it is already perfect, nothing needs to be added to it: it is perfectly shaped to do all that ought ever to be required of it. All it needs to do in order to meet every contingency that life may demand of it is to grow and develop. The only things that are missing at birth are strength, size and skill to accomplish general and special(ised) works. These (as we know) depend upon growth and training, which in turn are determined by many other factors which need not here be mentioned.

So also it is with us at the time of our Baptism into the body of Jesus Christ. Being at that time born members of His spiritual body, we are each one as particularly fitted to be a member of that body as is a hand to the physical body. Every born member is as a gift of the Spirit to that body, so that both the member and the body

should function aright. When the gift of eternal life by spiritual regeneration is given, quite often also, together with that birth, at least one gift of the Spirit is bestowed. If any member does not find this so, in simple faith, yet without strain, he should seek unto the Lord. No spiritual effort should be regarded as too great in order to secure one, so that meaningful, functional membership may be acquired. For as the hand is a gift from God to the physical body, enabling it to function aright, so also is a member with (a) gift of the Spirit a gift from God to the whole spiritual body of Christ.

The Cross is the Power

Now, as before stated, any gift given by the Spirit is in itself spiritual in origin, but having been once bestowed, for its permanent spirituality in use it depends very much upon the person to whom it is given. It must ever be remembered that the person so privileged must bear the responsibility for its use. If the individual remains spiritual, the gift will continue as spiritual as the Spirit who first gave it, but should that individual become carnal, the gift will also unavoidably become carnalized in use.

The only way an individual can preserve his gift in its original spiritual condition is by maintaining his own spirit in holiness and power, and always allowing the Holy Spirit Himself to work the gift. In the case of an oral gift, this means that the Holy Spirit must be the sole initiator and inspirer of each particular message. He must be both the beginning and the ending upon each occasion. If it be one of the other gifts, he must use it as from and by the power of the cross, or else the power that works it will be carnal soul power. Should this latter state become so with any member, the ultimate function can only be misleading, and its power destructive. Each of the gifts must only ever be a means of manifestation of the Spirit.

The Gifts are His

Having first understood this, it must also be realised that a gift is bestowed for the purpose of the manifestation of the Spirit. The gift itself is not that manifestation, it is only a particular form or means through which the Spirit manifests Himself. True it is that the gift at that time becomes obvious — that is unavoidable — but it is only an inanimate, abstract form, a means through which some spirit person or another is able to manifest himself. That is why in this section God is not just discussing spiritual means, but spiritual persons.

The gift does not spiritualise the person, but the person the gift, that is to say that as he co-operates with the Spirit for its function it is enhanced. The Holy Spirit does not normally work through a member/person of the body of Christ beyond the spiritual condition of that person. The Lord wishes to speak and work increasingly, and more powerfully and all the time; this will be quite possible to every member as the person keeps permanently filled with and alert to the Holy Spirit. Spiritual condition, spiritual power and spiritual achievement are interdependent. In order to manifest the Spirit, the gift of the Spirit, of whatsoever kind it may be, must be worked exclusively by the Spirit through the member. It may then be said to be used of the Spirit, so that although the gift is in operation, He is being manifest. The gift is being used, but not being displayed; then and then only is the gift spiritual in use.

The Holy Ghost must not be robbed of His gifts. They are, and always will be, His personal property. Persons who receive them must fully grasp this, for it is a basic principle, and the understanding upon which they are distributed. All must know that:

- 1) gifts do not belong to the gifted member;
- 2) no person must expropriate his gift;
- 3) he must not take over its working from the Spirit of God.

Should this latter take place, it is an evidence that Old Adam is again active, as in the beginning, robbing God of His rightful possessions.

Outwardly a person will be seen, heard, thought and said to be in possession of a gift, but inwardly he must know to whom it belongs and be used of God in it. He must not attempt to use it himself; if he does so it will be as of himself, and will only manifest himself, not the Spirit of the body. What each man must understand is that his functional gift is not really the gift to the body, but that he himself is that gift. In order for this to be, he must become utterly identified with the gift, so that to the members of the body he is identifiable and his position known. To a certain extent also, he himself will be evaluated by it. This can be quite easily

understood by us as when for instance a man becomes so known by his use of the gift of prophecy that he is called a prophet.

He is the Head of the Body

However, having come to the realisation that he himself is of more importance than the gift, a person must also know the importance of the gift with which he has been honoured. We have been made members of the body in order that the gift(s) we each have received may be used for the glory of the Christ and the edification and mutual benefit of every member of the body. Gifts of the Spirit are not only enablings, they are also entrustments, and because this is so, it at once becomes apparent that they must also be necessities.

The lifelong ministry of the saints is to build up the body, and the gifts are given for this fundamental purpose. The overall power and mastermind working through all this is in Jesus, the Head of the Body, and the Spirit animating the body is His Spirit, into which every member has been made to drink. Having thus become members of His body, each has to submit to Him in order to develop the mind of the Spirit of the body. Each member is a gift; what are called the gifts are means of function, enablings distributed to make the body fully operational among men now in the same way and by the same powers as the Lord Himself operated among men of old.

Discern the Body

Bearing the import of all this in mind, it is most significant that before speaking about these things, the apostle first censures two other grave irregularities which were common features of the general decadence and carnality of the Corinthian church at that time. When understood, it is entirely to be expected that he should do so. In the first of these he applies correction and instruction concerning Headship in the Church, and in the second he tells us about the spiritual communion of the body. Both have to do with relationships; the first that of the Head with the whole body, and the second that of each member with the others. Each is implied in the other, for they are interwoven. In each case he makes his main points quite plainly in verses 3 and 27.

The important subject of Head-covering in the Church has been very fully discussed in a pamphlet entitled *** 'A Sign of Authority', so for this reason it will not be examined here. Therefore we pass on to the second irregularity mentioned in this chapter, namely the Corinthians' wrong behaviour at what is called the Lord's Supper. This description of the meal immediately brings to our minds the ideas of Lordship and finality — it was a supper.

Dealing with, and hopefully clearing away, the absurd and distasteful practices into which the Corinthians had lapsed, the apostle takes them back in thought to that guest-chamber where the Lord entertained His chosen ones to their final meal in His presence. Their Lord supplied bread and wine, simple twin interdependent elements representing His body and His blood, man's true spiritual food. 'Do this in remembrance of Me', He said. 'Take, eat, this is My Body which is broken for you this cup is the New Testament in My Blood drink it'. Eat and drink it worthily, says the apostle; it is for your health and strength; discern the Lord's Body and keep alive and well, strong and healthy. Come to self-judgement and spiritual renewal; come to discern the Lord's body and to wholeness and health, come to Christ, your food and drink, eat Him, drink Him, live by Him and Him alone.

So saying the apostle prepares us for what he has to say in chapters 12 to 14. By these things we see more plainly still how that God's emphasis is truly upon the man rather than upon his gifts. God grant that, seeing this, we may realise in what attitude the spirituals must be held and used by spiritual men. Truly the word 'spiritual' has first to do with persons and only afterwards with power and performance.

A Foundation of Righteousness

The Spirit of God is clear; before any attempt be made at setting right the function and order of the gifts, the body must first of all be clear about the nature and principles of eternal righteousness. The body of Christ must be right, simply because it is His body; obedience is more precious in His eyes than gift or sacrifice or miracle. We must get this matter of headship and authority right before we pass on to power and performance.

Whether to past happenings or future events or present truth, in His spiritual body He must be perfectly correct in all His relationships. He was right in His body of flesh, and He must be right in His spiritual body. He is the

embodiment of Truth proceeding from the Father.

This is why Paul delays dealing with the spirituals until this late point of the epistle. He has approached the subject through eleven other chapters devoted to establishing fundamental principles and values, each of far greater import than the 'modus operandi' of the spirituals. Except he had done so he would have created an entirely wrong impression about the place and function of the gifts, and would have left the Corinthian situation basically unchanged. Had he done that, except by some later gracious intervention, the gifts would not have been, nor could have functioned ever again as spiritual means among them. They would have remained entirely devoid of the life and power and meaning of God, totally ineffectual, and incapable of achieving His objectives among men. The Word of Wisdom would have become man's wisdom, which is foolishness; the Word of Knowledge a demonstration of psychic prognostication by means of Extra Sensory Perception; Discernment of spirits an exercise in clairvoyant powers; Faith a hypnotic co-operation with powers of evil; Healing and Miracles satanic deceptions; Prophecy, Tongues and Interpretation would be utterances of men and devils, human at best and devilish at worst. Instead of gatherings together unto the praise and worship of God, meetings would have been sinful demonstrations of carnal powers to the accompaniment of sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. Everything would have been to the glory of man, the delight of satan and the dishonouring of God.

The Fellowship of His Son

How great is our joy then to discover Paul's approach to the whole Corinthian situation. He tells them that, although they come behind in no gift, primarily they have been called by God that they should enter into the fellowship of His Son (1:1-9). To understand these opening verses aright is to possess the key to all that follows, whether it be of life or worship or work or witness, or even the world to come.

In this matter of the spirituals, the gifts can only be spiritual if and as they are operated in the fellowship of the Son. If a man is out of fellowship with Him, that man's gifts are Carnals, or what is worse, Psychicals, or at the very worst Demoniacals. Whatever be the power of them, if a man is out of the fellowship of the Son it will certainly not be that power of God of which Paul speaks in verses 18 and 24. Plainly, if a man is to be spiritual, he must see and know What is his Calling, Who it is calling him, verse 9, to Where he is called, verse 9, Why he is called, and God's choice and purposes in calling him or the Wisdom of the Call, verses 26-29, the Work implied by the Call, verse 2 and verse 1, Why he is called into the fellowship, verse 18 (the Cross), or the Wonder of the Call.

The Head is Jesus

Returning to chapter 12 and looking with understanding at Paul's construction of this section on Spirituals, the observer may discover a testimony to the truth of the foregoing. The few introductory verses draw our attention to the Headship of Christ. In order to be a living body, everybody must have a head, even as every head, to be a living head, must have a body; the two are as interdependent as they are indivisible. They comprise one whole and share one life. As it is so surprisingly yet matter-of-factly said in verse 21, 'the head cannot say to the feet, I have no need of you', even though the Head is Jesus.

Although this is a most unexpected remark in this connection, it is also most obviously true and sane. How can any person's head go where it wishes except it has a body, or how can the head move the body from one place to another except it has feet with which to do so? It is no remarkable thing then that in the next verse our attention is drawn to necessities. When we assimilate the fact that this is our Head speaking of His dependence upon us, surprise gives way to awe. He is plainly telling us about our necessity to Him, and if this be so with Him, how much more should we feel our dependence upon Him? The body cannot say to the Head, 'I have no need of Thee'.

The Wonderful Works of God

However, before proceeding further with this particular line of investigation, we will follow Paul's thoughts and first examine the necessity of the Head to the body. In connection with the function of the Spirituals, he first reminds the Corinthians of a basic principle of which they must not be ignorant, 'ye were carried away ... ye were led'. In the past when they were idolaters, they had been quite content to abandon themselves to their leaders without question. They knew quite well that in order to exercise themselves fully in their heathen

worship and to extract from it the satisfaction that they sought in the past, it had been necessary for them to allow themselves to be carried away by some evil power.

Paul and they knew by experience that worship is an exercise which lies beyond self. It is only possible to those who abandon themselves to a power other and greater than their own. Men must be carried away into realms where worship is properly known and exercised in outpourings of the spirit upon the object of worship in sensible adoration. Worship does not consist of, nor can it exist in cool, calm, withdrawn self-containment. Truest worship is extravagance; it is the spending of self upon someone other, greater, higher than self, (see Luke 7.36-38 and 47; John 12:3; Rev. 4:6-11 and 5:11-14, as examples of true worship). It requires abandonment to the degree where the whole inward self is now subjected to and controlled by the indwelling Spirit to the point where it is borne up, strengthened and carried away, and is poured out in pure ecstatic realisation of glory in union with the life of Christ before the Father, where it is sustained in self-bestowal to the point of self-forgetfulness.

This worship, though not a demonstration of emotionalism, is nevertheless emotive loving in the Spirit of purity and holiness; it is the height of spirituality. Once known it enlightens us forever as to the reason for the use of the word Spirituals. For the accomplishment and enjoyment of this highest human glory, the entire self must co-operate with the Holy Spirit's leading, for it cannot otherwise be achieved.

When this blessed state is reached, as with those on the day of Pentecost, though not necessarily in an unknown tongue nor yet for the same purpose, the blessed Spirit will give utterance to the being, so that we speak unto Jesus, saying as here recorded, 'Jesus, Lord' (lit.). The Greek word translated 'utterance' in Acts 2:4, really means 'to utter in short pithy sentences' — weighty, meaty statements which express the essence of truth in power: in short, the felt appreciation of the Lord's working in the life, or the Church, or the universe. Whatever be the theme or subject of worship, the worshippers' hearts are poured out of their lips. 'They heard them speak ... the wonderful works of God'. That is when and where and how and why it all begins.

Jesus IS Lord

Right at the threshold of this section wherein we are introduced to the only scriptural revelation of a church at worship, the Headship and Lordship of Jesus is set exactly where it ought to be — first, or at the top. 'Jesus, Lord', upon the lips of human beings uttering their pure life — meaning with heart — adoration to Him is not just a mere acknowledgement of correct order, although it reveals it, nor is it an acquiescence to truth, although it is certainly that, nor is it an agreement to conform to Him in His body. 'Jesus, Lord', (who can speak the words of love?) is a transcendent, iridescent uprising and outflow of spirit in public confession of that sublime relationship which is the ground and glory of the mystery of the Christ of many members, verse 12.

We do well to note that it is strictly from this exquisite love-relationship with the Lord that Paul moves on to the diversity and differences of the gifts and their administration and operation, for otherwise none of them have any eternal meaning. The first manifestation of the Spirit is worship, and worship is a demonstration just as each one of the gifts. By linking together the twin exercises of worship and demonstration, he tells us that the same Spirit which leads and carries us away unto Jesus (the) Lord, is the same one who works the gifts. Therefore and thereby alone are they 'the Spirituals'; this alone is the reason why God is justified in so naming them. Truly He shows us that indeed 'modus vivendi' is greater than 'modus operandi'.

The Spirit is the Power

Commencing thus, the apostle yet delays from listing the gifts, choosing rather in verses 4-6 to draw our attention to the diversities of ways God works in and through them. Again he is emphasising that we have to learn and recognise that differences of application are of far greater importance than the great variety of the gifts themselves. It is as if he is saying 'now, before you seek any of these powers, know that in Christ and unto Christ your Head, the way a thing is spoken or done is of far greater importance than the thing which is being said or done. I am about to categorise the gifts or enablings of the Spirit, but I want you to understand that all these are really only means of application and communication: my brethren, tones, attitudes, approaches, manner(s) convey more than any of these words or works. Understand that the way these gifts or powers are administered and operated will count more in the long run than the immediate ends you hope to

achieve by their use

Quite simply Paul is continuing his theme of the Lordship and Headship of Jesus, carrying over the truth of relationship to which he has earlier referred and applying it in a still more particular way. It is absolutely 'not done', or to use his own words, 'we have no such custom among us' to display a certain attitude in worship and adopt a different one in works. A man's attitude must be the same upon every occasion, for there can be no difference in the Spirit which engages in them. God does not allow that it is possible to be one person to Him and another person to men; and the assumption that because a person's gift seems to operate smoothly, what is said must be right in the sight of God is a pitfall to be avoided at all times.

The same Spirit that gives utterance to our one Head must also give us utterance to all men, whether they are fellow-members of the body or not. The Spirit that governs attitude must also govern administration and operation. These verses clearly set forth that the 'same Spirit' is also the same Lord, and the same God, and the very next verse says that it is the manifestation of that same Spirit which is of the greatest importance of all. The most important thing is not what is being administered, operated, or manifested, but Who is being manifest, and how and in what manner all is being done.

The Manifestation of the Spirit

It is in this spirit, with this knowledge, and in this relationship that we are introduced to the gifts. Each of them is given to some member of the body to be a means of manifestation and application of that Spirit; indeed they are all given by God solely for that purpose. Moreover, according to that purpose each one is also intended to contribute to the growth and development of the body of Christ, to which end all are ideally suited and perfectly adaptable. Quite obviously, being spiritual gifts, they are supernatural, and are bestowed as additions to the already existing natural powers which human beings possess, for human powers are totally inadequate to do what He requires.

When God originally created man, He made him with these things in mind; however, whatever powers that great man Adam naturally had when God originally created him, we do not now have the gifts until they are bestowed upon us by the Holy Spirit. Man nevertheless is quite capable of operating them, being as perfectly made and designed for their function as is the lamp-holder for the lamp. As the lamp is designed for the lamp stand so that together they are one, so also the Church and the gifts of the Spirit are one. There can be no separating them except in theory or unto death; as the body with its members is one and the head and the body are one, so are the Church and the gifts. Analytically it is possible to distinguish between all these, but they cannot be separated in life.

Verse 11 says that all these gifts are worked by the selfsame Spirit dividing to every man severally as He will, and verse 7 says that the manifestation of the Spirit is given to 'every man'. In scripture no member of the body is allowed any ground to think that he is excluded; there can be no mistaking the all-inclusiveness of the words 'every man'. As if to reinforce this position, the phrasing of verse 28 plainly implies the same thing; there Paul noticeably changes from persons to operations, leaving the distinct impression that whoever holds and operates the gifts mentioned must become so identified with them that the gifts become known rather than the person. Surely all this must mean that each member is intended by God to receive and operate a gift, becoming so one with it that functionally he may give himself fully unto its use for the mutual benefit of all. Doing so with all his heart, he is helping to build up the body of Christ.

Christ is His Body

Returning to and re-reading the first half of the chapter, we find that this same thing is borne out by the use of the word 'for' in verses 8,12,13 and 14; it is amazing how much truth God packs into so few words as these. Everything here is of the Spirit and cannot be otherwise, for we have all been baptised in one Spirit into one Body, and in process have all been made to drink into one Spirit. One of the most remarkable features of this short section is the non-appearance in the text of the word 'head'. At first this may appear surprising, but close reading reveals that this is so because Head and Body are so one that God regards it as superfluous here to mention them separately. To have done so would have been inconsistent with the fact He was wanting to impress upon us, namely (verse 12), 'the body is one, many members ... one body ... Christ'.

That is the life God wants us to see, believe, receive and live in operationally with joy. We are not being

shown Christ and His body, but that Christ is His body; in God's view there is no difference, for truly considered they are inseparable. Analytically they could exist separately, but not in life. What is being said here is pinpointed in verse 14. Grammatically it is the ultimate goal which has been reached by the continued use of the word 'for', by which he links the verses.

The Same Spirit

Because Christ's spiritual body is compounded of many members, it is absolutely necessary that each of them should be filled with one Spirit only. Working back or upwards from this verse, we may state our conclusions as follows: by this means God ensured that each would not exist separately from, nor operate adversely to His purposes and each other. For this it was not sufficient just to immerse them in Spirit; for God's purposes the Spirit must be in each as much as each is in Him.

Further, because all the members together with the Head are one body, and that one body is Christ, the selfsame Spirit must work in every one of them together; each individual must know that it is happening in them. The will as well as the working of the Spirit must be known by all, for He is the Spirit of the mind (thinking, planning and purposing) of Christ in every member. In this capacity He gives to one member to do one thing and to another to do something else; He does not merely give, He gives to do. He has operation as well as possession in mind for us. Too readily and shortly we rest in an incomplete experience because of incomplete conception of what the Lord is wanting to do; too often we come short of the glory of God through ignorance.

We must realise that we only have eternal life in Christ as being a member of Him; this being so, we must also recognise that consequently we have a functional capacity in and for Him. We must also understand that whatever is bestowed upon us cannot be allowed to be our own, for it is in Him and is therefore His. Therefore no functional action may be taken as from ourselves, but only by Him through us. By this we see that the Spirit distributes His gifts with the sole object in view that He should be the one who exclusively operates and administers them. This is clearly shown by the repeated use of the phrase 'the same Spirit', 'to one is given by the same Spirit the word of wisdom, to another by the same Spirit ... the same Spirit'. This is so because God wants the Spirit of the Body as well as the function of the Body manifest to all.

What Spirit are Ye of?

Recalling an incident from the history of the earthly life of the Lord Jesus as recorded in Luke 9.51-56, will suffice us for an illustration of this great truth. It occurred during the course of the Lord's final journey up to Jerusalem and His ultimate victory there. The apostles, incensed by the attitude of some Samaritans towards the Lord, said to Him, 'shall we call down fire from heaven and consume them as Elijah did?' To this the Lord answered, 'ye know not what spirit ye are of ...', which shows that although greatly privileged at that time, the apostles did not have nor could they function in the same Spirit as the Lord.

His Spirit is the spirit of salvation, preservation, grace, love, forgiveness, but theirs was not, so He restrained and reproved them. What they wanted to do was quite foreign to His Spirit, but then they were not members of His body at that time. Therefore they were not of Him, nor could they be, for they had not as yet been baptised into Him and it. They were of His company, but not of His Spirit. We may safely assume that they had either the gift of faith or of miracles, perhaps even both, for they were quite certain that they could actually call down fire, and perform the destructive miracle. Seemingly they had the gift which enabled them to do so, but the Spirit of the Body, and therefore of Christ, would not have been manifested by such an act. And no wonder either, for these men were seeking to model themselves upon Elijah, it was he who had performed the miracle which the apostles wanted to emulate.

His Body — His Spirit

Consideration of all this immediately raises a problem which we will do best to face at this point, namely is it possible to have and be used in a gift of the Spirit and not be a member of the Body of Christ? If this can be so, what then was the spirit which animated the apostles at that time if it was not the Holy Spirit, which animates the Body of Christ? Taken in order, an answer to each question may be set out as follows:

(1) firstly a plain 'yes'; the abilities and functions now known as the gifts of the Spirit are really the natural

powers of Jesus Christ; they are the means by which He accomplished His works. While here on earth He authorised some of His disciples to go out with and preach the gospel they then knew, and also do some of His works. For this He equipped them to a limited extent with some of His abilities, and delegated to them the power and authority which was His by reason of His Sonship and Anointing:

(2) the real power which animates the Body of Christ is without doubt the Spirit of Christ.

The Body, beside being His own, must just as truly be indwelt by His own Spirit, for only by his own spirit can any person be alive — that is have being and move and think and speak and work in his own body. During the whole of the Lord's earthly ministry, and even following His resurrection, the apostles were not of His Spirit, but were of the spirit of the Old Covenant. All miracles wrought by prophets and saints of the Old Covenant were achieved by the Holy Spirit coming upon them. At that time the Holy Spirit did not dwell within men in the same way and for the same purposes as He did from Pentecost onwards. Until Pentecost the apostles, in common with their forebears, did not know the Spirit's indwelling (John 14:15 and 16) but only Christ's special enabling for service.

It is not therefore greatly difficult for us to understand that the Spirit into which we are made to drink while being baptised in the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, whose same body it is into which we are baptised. Therefore the gifts of the Spirit which members of the body receive may only be thought of as the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and as being bestowed distinct from the Spirit of Christ, because it is by means of the baptism in the Holy Spirit that we receive ability to possess and function in them. They are each one bestowed by Christ from His fullness upon His members, and are named in a definitive manner as equipage unto specific ends. His abundance is thereby fully distributed among the members of His Body as their immediate heritage in order to enable each to function as He in specially defined ways, each of which is indicated by the name of the gift.

Wisdom and Knowledge

Thus what was displayed in Him naturally as marvellous Wisdom, became, when bestowed upon a member of His Body, a gift of the Spirit, when it became the Word of Wisdom. So also is it with His profound Knowledge; in bestowal it becomes the Word of Knowledge. In fact, with the exception of the last two, some such thing could be said of all the gifts. All divine wisdom and knowledge are not granted as permanent gifts to any man, although all God's wisdom and knowledge are behind their limited expression or defined application in the form of a gift. The Word of Wisdom or of Knowledge is given in grace as a temporary and limited bestowal from that eternal fullness in sufficient measure to meet the internal or external functional needs of the body at that time. If functioning properly, it will operate continuously during the lifetime of the member whose gift it is. But although in certain conditions the gift as a means can be residual, the function is only ever conditional and occasional.

This may be quite easily grasped when it is remembered that a hand and its function will depend entirely upon power under direction and control from the head, Although its existence and position are continuous and its power is constantly implied, its function is only of an intermittent nature. Although all the whole fullness and content of the powers referred to by each gift are not bestowed with the gift, when the gift is functioning, all the fullness of all the power is concentrated upon that member/gift for its operation.

King in His Kingdom

There is a further lesson to be learned from Luke 9 concerning the true function of the gifts, and it is this: although the two apostles apparently had the means and power to call down fire from heaven, they dare not attempt to do so without permission from the Lord; they said, 'Lord, wilt Thou?' In His day apparently, except it be His will, the gifts could not function; His will must be sought and permission granted before they could operate. He was at that time recognised by His disciples as absolute King in His own kingdom. Now that He is glorified, the Lord is not less King in His own kingdom than He was previously. To this day in His kingdom nothing other than His will may be done. It must therefore be true that the gifts of the Spirit to be spirituals can only function by His power, and may only operate and be administered according to His will.

Further to this, we find that when in the beginning of the gospel Peter was given the keys of the kingdom, he opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. This was accomplished through the outpouring of the Spirit in Cornelius' house at Caesarea, the Jewish province with the gentile name. Ever since then, given the right

conditions under all true gospel ministry of the Spirit, Gentiles may enter directly into the kingdom. Some time later, following Peter's ministry, Paul visited Corinth and at that time also many entered the kingdom, for under his ministry, as well as Peter's, they were baptised in the Spirit into the Body of Christ. Drinking into His Spirit, they first received and then functioned in all the gifts He gave them, and following the departure of the apostle they had reigned as kings. But although this had been so with them then, at the time when Paul wrote to the church, many of them were weak and sickly, and many slept.

With all their blessings and privileges, the Corinthian church was a failure. They had aspired to kingly authority (Paul said 'would to God ye did reign, that we might reign with you') and with carnal audacity many of the members had expropriated the gifts of the Spirit, making what were originally the priceless gifts of God the worthless possessions of men. The result was that the oral gifts when in use became nothing more than sounding brass and tinkling cymbal; likewise all the other gifts had become devoid of power. They were just mere human attempts at trying to make something work. The Spirituals had sunk to psychicals and had become Carnal(s), man's abilities and not God's. The Church's misappropriation of God's properties can only result in mishandling and misapplication to man's needs, whether to the Church or to the world of men outside it.

Lord of His Body

Instead of Christ, the Corinthians had reigned. They ought to have sought to do the King's will and to obtain His permission. Instead they had presumed that since they had the gifts, they were at liberty to use them as and when they liked, whatever their state of life was at the time. Now the fact of the matter is that, although upon the surface it may appear that the gifts function in this manner, God does not give them upon such humanistic conditions; He did not do so in those days and neither does He do so now. On the contrary, to this day they will only work properly upon the same principle as they did during the days when the King was in His physical body on the earth, namely by direct bestowal from the Lord (Luke 9:1 and 2) and in close co-operation with Him, both as to timing and objective, as has already been instanced in verses 54 and 55.

To be sure the relationship which exists between Master and disciples is of a quite different nature from that of Head and Body/member, but the principle of function by divine authority remains the same. It is illogical to reason and therefore to believe that because a gift is spiritual in origin and was bestowed during or following upon Baptism in the Spirit, it is infallibly Spiritual in use. It is also false for persons to assume that because they have been baptised in the Spirit, they are therefore and thereby henceforth always in the Spirit and may use their gifts as and when they please, or whenever they attend meetings, and that being so used the gift will be Spiritual in operation and effect. On the other hand, although this must not be assumed, it is to be expected that the body of gifts should function as naturally and smoothly as a body ought.

A healthy body ordinarily functions so naturally and the particular action of each member is so beautifully controlled and synchronised each with each for the common good, that all can quite easily move as one. But although we know that much which happens in a body is of a reflex nature, we also know that nothing is either autonomous or automatic. No member decides to do something itself as though it has a mind of its own. Every detail of action is under the command of the common brain, even though often that action is too spontaneous in movement for conscious thought to control. This is because some actions must be taken in faster time than conscious thought can be stimulated or decisions taken and the necessary action or procession of actions voluntarily initiated under control of the conscious mind. This is as possible as it is necessary by reason of a vast and complex nervous system originally devised by God, and fully developed within the babe before birth.

This highly sensitive inner network was created by an all-wise, benevolent Creator for the proper function and protection of His creatures. The blinking of an eyelid, for instance, can be done voluntarily and deliberately by any person, but usually it happens quite involuntarily, often without the person being at all aware of it. In fact the most important functions of the human body are almost all, if not entirely without exception, executed apart from the prior conscious consent of the person. All of which leads to the realisation that behind the conscious mind of the race lies a great predestinating mind that originally fixed basic human bodily reactions according to the good pleasure of His will.

The Carnal Mind

There are also many other factors which should be taken into account if a full study of these things were to be undertaken, but except to mention one of these we will continue with our main theme. Deeper than the above-mentioned system, which has been ineradicably rooted in the mind by God far below conscious thought levels, lies an inborn mentally-operated process which controls the nature and quality of thought. This is spirit-based and was first governed by its Creator, who thereby made man a creature capable of total response to Him and His will.

However, by the fall of Man in Eden, the human being came under the power and headship of satan the usurper, who took over control from God by a cleverly disguised ruse through which he trapped Adam into sin. This, though unspecified at the time, was nonetheless inevitable, for the purpose in satan's heart, which lay behind the temptation, was that the man should react against the will and spoken word of God. By making the voluntary agreement with the serpent Adam went to death, choosing the prideful position of being able to know and discern between good and evil rather than obey God. He did this without knowing or properly considering that from that moment he would or might be without power to do the good.

Perhaps if he had known the immediate effect and fullest consequences of his choice he may have acted differently; but speculation is profitless. What we do know is that from that moment Lucifer's original decision to choose the opposite to God's desires was implanted by him into the father of the human race. Since then it has continued within man as a fixed disposition to defy and disobey God — the sin nature, variously called by Paul 'the carnal mind' or 'the law of sin which worketh in my members'. In all natural men it is all-powerful, irresistible, unalterable, subconscious and all-pervading. Its base is in the spirit of the mind rather than in the mind itself. Being the unknown, undetectable mind behind the dead spirit of man, it controls the spirit of the mind of every man, deciding the quality of each thought, word and action, permanently fixing it as rebellious, and making it the enemy of all righteousness.

Through this mind of the evil spirit which is controlling him, man's mind is no longer linked with God's but satan's. Worse still, this spiritual mind has about it a predestinating quality, so that nothing a man does voluntarily or involuntarily can be intrinsically good. We see therefore that because he controls the spirit and mind of man, satan also governs the inception and quality and condition and outworkings of all things human. This being so, he overrules all man's best intentions and efforts, with the result that nothing he does or says can be to the glory of God.

Man therefore in and of himself cannot please God sufficiently to save himself, nor can he, unaided by the Lord, even commend himself to God. But upon being baptised by Christ in the Spirit into His own Body, two things take place in man:

(1) his own carnal mind (or the manifestation of the law of sin, by which satan mentally controls him through his dead spirit) is removed: (2) by drinking into the Spirit of the Body of Christ, that is Christ's Spirit, he is now placed under the control of the mind of Christ.

The Indwelling Lord

Now the mind of Christ is the only one which works in His Body; no-one else's can function or control there. Because this is so, it ought reasonably to be expected by all the members that to some extent the gift(s) they have do function according to His direction and power, and not their own. We are not now, as those of old, serving a Master without, but a Lord within; we are within His Body, serving Him and not ourselves by means of these gifts He has so freely bestowed upon us. Whereas formerly He had to command men as from without, His power is now working and moving us from within. This being so, we may be sure that if we maintain and foster the union and communion between ourselves and Him, the gifts with which we have been entrusted will indeed truly be His alone, used by Him exclusively.

Part 2

The Word of Wisdom

[The Wisdom of Love](#) * [According to His Will](#) * [A Pearl of Great Price](#) * [The Logos of the Cross](#)

The Wisdom of Love

Possessing this knowledge and proceeding to an examination of His gifts to us, we may perhaps agree that it is of great significance that the first gift through which the Spirit of the body manifests itself is stated to be the Word of Wisdom.

In the light of all that we have so far gathered, we may at this point summarise what we have learned thus: we are baptised in the Spirit; we have drunk into one Spirit; we say 'Jesus, Lord' by the Spirit; we realise that the same Spirit functions through a variety of different gifts; we know that the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man for profit to all, and we now see also that He manifests Himself chiefly as the Spirit that speaks wisdom. Such knowledge is most precious and comforting. What a blessing it is to know that the Holy Ghost, the Spirit in which the entire body lives and by which it always functions, is the Spirit of Wisdom.

But great as all this is upon the sacred page, the sad fact is that, like Adam of old, in practice the church at Corinth had ceased to be wise. This is brought out most clearly in the second epistle, chapter 11, where Paul implies that they had been beguiled and corrupted as Eve was by the serpent. Under the circumstances then, what other could Paul do than write to them concerning their folly and give them plain instruction about the nature of Wisdom, this most precious grace and gift? To no other church did Paul speak of wisdom to the same extent as he did to these people. So great is the urge within him as he writes to them, that before he has reached a third of the way through this letter, he uses the word 'wisdom' fifteen times; seven times in the first chapter and six times in the second. So also is it with the word 'wise'; in chapter one he uses it five times (once as wiser) and in chapter three five times more, ten times in all.

From all of this we can see how great was his concern over their inexcusable folly. Not that absence of wisdom was their greatest folly; way back behind that lay their chiefest crime — lack of love. Lack of wisdom is folly, but lack of love is sin. Simple foolishness is no crime against God; unavoidable ignorance is no sin, but not to love (see chapter 13) is indeed sin, and therefore finally must be of greatest folly. Nevertheless, when compiling the list of Christ's virtues in chapter 1, he shows the supremacy of wisdom by placing it at the head; 'Christ ... is made unto us Wisdom ...' he says.

According to His Will

According to verse 31, this is in order that all glorying should be in the Lord. Glorying must not be in men (verse 12), nor in whoever it was that baptised us in water (verses 13-17), nor in the wisdom of men (verses 18-25), nor in anything we inherited by reason of, or that was imposed upon us from, our first birth, God has deliberately chosen to do everything in the Church according to His own will, so that no flesh should be able to glory in His presence (verse 29).

It would appear that among the Corinthians there were those who had ceased to regard this wisdom as being characteristic of God. Not that the Word of Wisdom as a gift was not highly regarded among them; quite possibly it was still being faithfully spoken among them through some person or other, for verses 5-7 declare plainly that they were enriched in all utterance and knowledge. The testimony of Christ was so confirmed among them, that all the gifts were present and functional in the church.

But wisdom does not reside in utterances of wise words; it lies in loving acceptance and faithful obedience to them. Wisdom is in life and deed, not in gift and word; as it is written in 4:20, 'the kingdom of God is not in word but in power'. God, who is Wisdom, rules by power not by words. This fact is confirmed by John when speaking of love in his first epistle, chapter 3, verse 18, 'let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth'. The fundamental and enduring principle governing all life and words and work in God's kingdom is that life and work are greater than gift and word. This is true, both in the elementary matters of the outward Kingdom of Heaven, or in the more advanced spiritual elements and developments of life within the inner Kingdom of God.

Paul brings to our notice the most fundamental exhibition of this in 1:17-25; 'the word of the Cross' is God's greatest 'word of wisdom'. While man seeks after wisdom, thinking that wise words proclaim the presence of an Oracle whom they may admire, we preach 'Christ crucified ... the power of God and (therefore) the wisdom of God'. All the wisdom and understanding of man must be destroyed, and not the least reason for this is that for the major part it is contained in sayings and writings. Wisdom is not a collection of wise words,

although they may have been spoken by the wisest men of the ages. True Wisdom is accounted to be foolishness by men; there is no wisdom in them, for they despise the Christ of the Cross, who is made unto us wisdom.

A Pearl of Great Price

The tragedy of the Corinthians was that they too were 'walking as men' (3:3). Seeking after wisdom, they almost certainly adored and used the gift, but only for their own carnal ends: 'the Greeks (Hellenists, Gentiles) seek after wisdom' Paul says. But as soon as this attitude is adopted toward any of the gifts, although they may seem to be powerful in operation and appear to hold their original God-given content in utterance, they are nevertheless empty shards; clouds without water; deceptions which in the end are sure to demonise and not spiritualise people. All such practice is really misuse, it is abuse of privilege, showmanship.

That such a thing should be is no less than tragic, for this most excellent pearl of wisdom, when set among the other 'precious stones' with which God adorns His temple, is at once seen to be absolutely unique. Wisdom is universally valued among men as the most precious pearl of all. How then could it be so debased? Perhaps we may allow ourselves to be taught a lesson from this. Certainly if we neglect what God here sets forth, we have little hope of pleasing Him, or of attaining to that manhood in Christ for which He pleads in 14:20 and 13:11, but instead must fail and, as the Corinthians were at that time, remain carnal, unspiritual babes (3:1-3).

Let us learn that because God, by Paul, says that the crucified Christ is His own power and wisdom, He is surely teaching us that our most powerful wisdom is to be crucified Christians. Let no man reject this truth through misunderstanding: a crucified man is not a dead man, he is eternally alive, living for ever as a crucified man. A man ceases to be a man if he be crucified and dead; he becomes by crucifixion a dead corpse, not a dead person. A crucified man is a living person who has gone through death, and behold he is alive for evermore! In truth there is no such person at all as an uncrucified Christian; to be a Christian, a person must have been personally crucified.

Beside this, God is also laying down a principle of truth for the operation of all the gifts, namely this: there is no power for good, nor is the wisdom of God in any of them either in themselves or in their use except it be the power and wisdom of Christ crucified. Wisdom of words makes the cross of Christ of none effect, so He says; flesh and not the Spirit is glorying if the cross be ineffective when the word of wisdom is in operation among us. It may achieve results in certain areas to limited degrees, but it cannot be of infinite value in the Spirit nor be to the glory of God.

The Logos of the Cross

This is the reason why Paul in writing to them, is very careful to use the distinctive word 'Logos' in 1:18 and 12:8. The former verse should be read, 'for the Word (Logos) of the Cross ... is the power of God', and set in contrast to 'the wisdom of words which makes the cross of none effect', in verse 17. The Spirit which operates the gifts in the body of Christ must make the cross of Christ effective in His members, or He cannot hope to achieve His purposes in operating the gift. By the language of Paul 'the Word (Logos) of the Cross' and 'the Word (Logos) of Wisdom' are definitely linked, with the result that the cross is shown to be the real power of the Word of Wisdom. For the Church the Logos which was made flesh (John 1:14) had to become the Logos of the Cross before He could be the Logos of Wisdom.

Obviously, in God's order, being and deed precede words. The Word can only be the Word of Wisdom if it is the Word of the Cross, for the Word and the Cross are one, Christ crucified. Whatsoever gift there be in the Body of Christ can only be in the Body of Christ crucified. Therefore to function properly it must partake of the power of the cross. The real power of the gifts in the Church is the cross of the Christ of the Cross, for it is by this power that sin and self are permanently excluded from them; then and not until then are they really spirituals. An uncrucified man is a carnal man, for he has forsaken God's wisdom and power. The Man of the Spirit is the crucified Man. Even Christ cannot now be known after the flesh, He is the spiritual MAN — we are His BODY.

The Supremacy of Understanding Love.

Adam's Irretrievable Loss * In Understanding be Men * That Ye may Know

At the head of the nine gifts listed in I Corinthians 12, God has placed the Word of Wisdom. This gift is placed at the head of the body of gifts in this chapter in close association with Knowledge — though above it. Thus God has shown His own great wisdom, for in the following verses it is said that all the rest of the other great variety of gifts are worked by the one and selfsame Spirit which works this one. It follows therefore that all the gifts which we shall now examine must be used in the Spirit of Wisdom, for each is a part and proof of that Wisdom and can only properly be used as an application of it.

Perhaps this has not been sufficiently understood among us. Certainly it was precisely because the Corinthians of old failed to grasp this that Paul needed to correct their behaviour. Their general state and their worship of God and the manner in which they operated the gifts was so bad that he had to redirect them completely; they had gone sadly astray. Ignorance and abuse so abounded, that it is plain why Wisdom is given the premier position. There are many reasons for this, any one of which is sufficient justification for the choice; however we will examine just one of these.

Adam's Irretrievable Loss

Going back to the book of Genesis, we discover that Adam followed Eve's example and lead. He responded to satan's temptation by partaking of the forbidden fruit, with the result that he sold out the whole of the as yet unborn race to satan. By this act Adam not only proved guilty of unbelief, disobedience and pride, but before God he was guilty of crass folly also. Greedily reaching out after and stealing the promise of certainty of knowledge, this man revealed that he was either too ignorant to distinguish the difference between wisdom and knowledge, or else that he deemed knowledge to be greater than wisdom; as may be expected the result was that he became an absolute fool.

At that time Adam was the head of all creation, the wise man of the earth who God had placed over all other creatures, but in order to gain forbidden knowledge he forsook his wisdom and deliberately chose to disobey God. Whatever vain thoughts or fond imaginings went through his mind then, all were folly, for by his act he revealed his willingness, if not his eagerness, to abandon all wisdom for the attainment of knowledge, and in doing so became vain. The trespass he committed was not just an act whereby he temporarily reversed the order of wisdom and knowledge, making knowledge to be first and wisdom second; he rejected wisdom altogether.

What Adam really did was to declare that, by increasing his knowledge in forbidden spheres, man becomes wiser, which is an absolute lie. By His act Adam deliberately rejected the truth and denied the fact that man's wisdom is revealed only by obedience to God in order to grow in knowledge of his Creator and Lord. Adam's wisdom was to know God, and by refusing to acknowledge what real wisdom is, he ceased to know God.. Worse than that, he set in motion the foolish train of human ideas upon which Paul later makes certain comments, such as 'the world by wisdom knew not God', 'God hath made foolish the wisdom of this world'. By these, and many other like sentences, all designed to set forth the wickedness of Adam's act and its consequences, the apostle showed that all 'the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God', for all is derived from carnal knowledge.

The deadliness of this original act of dethronement of true wisdom lay in its predestinating power to bring man to total degeneracy — instanced for us historically by Moses when he reveals the prevailing condition of all flesh just preceding the flood. But so great was the effect of Adam's sin that it outlasted the flood, persisting in Noah's family, and despite God's grace, causing all spirit(ual) manifestation which followed thereafter to be evil of origin. By the first man's sin, knowledge became nothing but natural intimate knowledge of evil, operating solely upon human levels unto soulish ends.

Just as inevitably all the other powers mentioned or unmentioned in this list of gifts also fell; without exception they all became carnal effusions, which, although they at first sight or hearing or feeling may seem right and good and beneficial, are in reality evil both in beginning and ending. Mankind, having become fallen, sinful and evil in nature, powers and works, had no hope apart from intervention by God; there was no possibility of him retrieving his lost estate or regaining his original position. This God undertook to do by sending His Son to restore the situation by the cross.

In Understanding be Men

In this whole section of scripture under consideration, Paul is most concerned to make plain to us what are 'the principal thing(s)', this is why wisdom is accorded the primary position in the list of gifts. But even so, from an overall reading it becomes clear that in doing this he is actually presenting wisdom as part of something greater still, namely Understanding. Over all the blessings of possessing spiritual gifts, God desires each of His children to be in enjoyment of this most blessed state of spiritual excellence. 'I give you to understand', he says: and again, in understanding be men'.

It is no less than wonderful (even though upon reflection we may agree that it is only to be expected) that the three principal mental attributes of God, namely Understanding, Wisdom and Knowledge, should be grouped together in this connection, for in no other place do we find it so. This mighty trilogy of excellencies is the chiefest glory of Love, which is here placed central to the whole passage, and extolled above all. Without question and by unchallengeable law, Love is at the heart of this whole body of truth. Love is the nature of the person who indwells the Body; our God whose Spirit manifests itself through the gifts is Love, all-wise, all-knowing and all-understanding.

Although it is not included in the list of Spirituals, Understanding is indivisibly linked with Wisdom and Knowledge, and shall be throughout all ages, for by its very nature it is fundamental to both. Although, like Wisdom, it can only be spoken of in an abstract manner, it cannot possibly be of merely academic meaning or interest, because for its very existence it requires the warm personality of Love. Understanding is the result of Love tried, tested and found strong in all heights and lengths and breadths and depths, infinitely immense and utterly profound. Understanding is Love's flexibility and adaptability: it has that quality of compassionate sympathy which has been wrought out of living and suffering like things with others, enduring the same temptations and persecutions as its fellows. It is the result of application, the fruit of experience, true wealth from the storehouse of consecrated life; Understanding issues into the perfect flower of Wisdom, borne of it from the same root of Love. Being like it, and allied to it, Wisdom appears almost its twin, for Wisdom is a form of Understanding, its distillation, as indeed also is each one of these precious gifts. Each is a particular demonstration of the spiritual understanding stored up in the sweet personality of the Christ Jesus of Love, to be manifested by the Spirit at His will.

Understanding is the stem upon which Wisdom flowers from Love's long-suffering from whence all understanding is gained. Love suffering long without envy, in utter humility in all things, meekly subjecting itself without reserve, issues in experience, which sooner or later finds expression and becomes known as Understanding. As the flower reveals the glorious nature of the root and is the most beautiful expression of its life, so also Wisdom blossoms forth as the beauty of understanding love.

That Ye may Know

In turn, and as its direct result, wisdom must become correct knowledge, for although blossom is sweet and wonderful, it must realise its end in fruit, or else it flowers in vain. God has caused some flowers to bloom just for their beauty and scent, but these are momentary things, flourishing for a few days and then passing away for ever. But there are blossoms which are promises of greater things, for lying in their hearts are the fruits they herald and for which they bloom and with whose existence they are bound up. Such is Wisdom.

As far as we are aware there was no tree of Wisdom in Paradise, but there was a tree of Knowledge (of Good and Evil), and it was a tree of fruit. Understanding and Wisdom in Adam had caused him to leave it alone until by temptation he fell into the sin of disobeying God. Knowledge gained by sin is loss of wisdom, for it is gained at the price of life; Knowledge must always be the fruit of Wisdom. Wisdom must flower for this, for Wisdom cannot exist as Wisdom alone; it is of Understanding unto Knowledge.

Flawless, factual and fragrant as it is, Wisdom exists for nothing if it does not ultimately issue in proper behaviour and actions and words which show its power. True Knowledge is gained from Understanding by Wisdom. Though Knowledge may be instructed from what it sees and hears and handles, and may be informed by the senses, to be spiritual it must be an accumulation from Wisdom, for it is the store of its virtues in the same way as Learning is the store of the mind.

The Word of Knowledge.

[The Counterfeit 'Knowledge'](#) * [The Jewel of Rare Worth](#)

The true Knowledge spoken of in scripture is certainty of assurance and most basic to life; it is a result of that exclusive understanding which itself is only gained as from intimate relationship. Jesus defined it best, saying 'this is life eternal, that they may know Thee'. The Word of Knowledge may only be spoken from that union. When it is uttered, it is the expression of spiritual familiarity with God, and whenever and upon whatever subject it speaks, the Word of Knowledge is the final word of wisdom and understanding upon that subject. Therefore it must always be received by every person in meekness of spirit and godly fear, for it is the testimony and application of Love. It is also a statement of His will, full of purpose and assurance, and should be embraced without questioning or hesitation.

The Counterfeit 'Knowledge'

This gift, however, is not to be confused with knowledge gained by reason of a man's spirit becoming familiar with the spirits of other men, for all such knowledge and every statement from it is but the psychic utterance of mediumistic souls. Instead of being the means whereby God's knowledge is imparted to men, the familiar spirit picks up, transmits and inflicts the possessor with the conflicts, bondages and afflictions of fellow humans. Such a person may quite correctly diagnose and pronounce upon the state or feelings of a fellow human, and often does so with the best intentions, but this in no way alters the fact that the source of the power is human and not divine. Consequently, whether ignorantly or deliberately, in operation it makes pronouncements which are either merely based upon its own feelings, or culled from its store of acquired knowledge, or else it makes statements which are deliberately imparted by deceiving spirits as superimpositions upon the human ability.

Such statements or prognostications are not Words of Knowledge, although they may be mistakenly made and often accepted as such, and in some instances may prove to be correct. Of old the Lord spoke with fine scorn about such practices, linking the monthly prognostications with stargazers and astrologers. This kind of psychic manifestation was rife among the Children of Israel in their carnal state; it substituted the genuine gift with the result that it practically deceived the whole nation. This disconcertingly dangerous power is most prevalent among persons who, by reason of extrasensory perception, are naturally aware of other people's states. It is rife in the churches today and is the direct result of man having become other than spiritual.

God's gift of the Word of Knowledge to any person is not to be confused with any kind of highly developed human soul-power. It is most often spoken by an individual quite apart from his knowledge of having spoken it. It is certainly at its best when spoken from such ignorance — 'I know nothing of myself' is the great understanding from which to commence in this gift.

The Jewel of Rare Worth

Let us once again recall the truth that no spiritual ability or power retains its original spirituality unless the spiritual life of the member to whom it was given is maintained in quality and developed in scope beyond the measure of his stature when the gift was first bestowed. With regard to the function of this gift, this is a most important thing to bear in mind, for if Wisdom is the Pearl, then Knowledge is the Diamond. Now the diamond is a most precious stone. Cut and polished expertly it reflects the sparkling wonders of light in unrivalled brilliance. It is a jewel of rare worth, highly prized among men. How careful then must we be with this Knowledge, for unless it is held in fondest love, and used with grace, it puffs up the possessor and pierces and wounds and cuts down the hearer and grinds him to powder.

The Gift of Discernment.

To this supreme trio of God's mental attributes which are first openly revealed in scripture and then shown in full development in the person of Jesus Christ, the Lord has added to the Church the gift of Discernment. This power is a similar kind of gift to Knowledge. In function it is somewhat like it and is sometimes confused with it. This is quite an easy mistake to make, for in a sense it is knowledge gained as a result of 'sight', which is why it is called Discernment. This gift is specially conferred upon the Church for the purpose of discerning spirits, and must be distinguished from the grace of spiritual discernment which to some degree is commonly

the property of every member of Christ's Body.

Paul speaks of this grace in 2:15, telling us that it is part of the spiritual life which all the children of God inherit, and is bestowed so that we all may discern all things. Here let us again note that none but the spiritual retain the ability. The obvious distinction between the different functions of the grace and the gift is nicely brought out by a comparison of 'things' with 'spirits'. Recognising this, and acknowledging God's great wisdom in bestowing the grace, we can also see His reason for bestowing this further ability upon the Church as a special gift added to the grace.

The main functional difference between this gift and the Word of Knowledge lies in this: the latter is the means granted by the Lord to some members of His Body so that they may pronounce with His knowledge upon any subject, object, need or state; the specific function of Discernment is to recognise the presence of any spirits foreign to the spirit of the Body, and more particularly of evil spirits. According to scripture its function is limited to this definite end and does not cover the whole field of knowledge of subjects about which the Church may need to have definite, divine information.

Added to the trio mentioned above, this gift of Discernment helps to form with them an invincible quartet of advanced powers, and when these four are held and used together in spiritual life as God intends, their combined force makes the Church a body of unrivalled ability in the world of men.

Contemplating the three which are called gifts, namely Wisdom, Knowledge and Discernment, it becomes obvious why the Church should be the most understanding company on the earth. These wonderful abilities lie chiefly in the mental realm, which is to say that, although they are spiritual gifts, they operate from the mind of the head and in a particular way are associated with the glories of that mind.

However, beyond these, the Body has also been endowed with gifts which in thought are associated with the body rather than the head. In order to be demonstrated as attributes of Love, all this Wisdom, Knowledge and Discernment must be applied in wealth of Understanding to human need, else they will do nothing but puff up. There would be no wisdom in having knowledge and discernment without ability to meet the ignorance and need they expose, else these gifts would not be of Love. Instead they would only be highly developed means of self-applied agony, instruments of curse and torture instead of powers to impart blessing to those who possess them.

Faith, Healing and Miracles.

For the above reason the Lord has also given to His Church some other gifts which are to be received and held as powers complementary to the foregoing, for He has designed and given them to that end. These particular gifts are listed as Faith, Healing and Miracles, each of which may be specifically thought of as one of the major working powers of the Body. These three, wherever they are revealed in scripture, are for the most part, if not entirely, associated with action of some sort. In this they are distinct from the former three, even though each of those are spoken of in an active form — Word of Wisdom, Word of Knowledge and Discernment of spirits. All three require either the action of speech or the action of discernment by the inward man, but we do not ordinarily think of these mental or spiritual exercises as action.

On the other hand, from a reading of Hebrews 11, it is at once obvious that, although Faith is first introduced to us therein in terms of understanding, most of the chapter is devoted to showing us its association with various activities. Working, walking, building, offering, and other things involving work or expenditure of energy in some way are presented as being by Faith. This is also borne out by other scriptures, such as Luke 5, where we are plainly told that when four men let down a friend on his bed through the roof to the feet of Jesus, 'He saw their faith'. In all these cases to which we refer, faith is shown to be action involving physical work.

Again this can be said of Healing. Often such phrases as 'He laid His hands on them and healed them', link the resultant healings with His or some other person's activity. We find it the same also with Miracles. The New Testament records that when Jesus turned water into wine, it was only possible because in association with His power and at His direction the servants engaged in much activity, filling, bearing in and pouring out the wine, and so the glorious miracle was brought into effect. Again the miracle of sight-giving to the man born blind was only accomplished by Jesus through the means of spittle and clay and the ultimate washing in

the pool following an arduous journey to Siloam.

If we think of the miracles of the feeding of the multitudes it is the same; these works of power were only accomplished by the Lord taking and breaking, and the apostles distributing the bread and fish. We could go on in this vein to establish the grounds upon which we rightly associate Faith, Healing and Miracles with application of power accompanied by physical effort: in fact the very word 'Miracles' is really a translation of the Greek word 'Powers'. Although all the spirituals are operable by power from on high, only this one is called by this name.

The Supremacy of Faith

Now as in the former trilogy of Spirituals, Wisdom held the premier position, so also Faith holds first place in this group. The reason for this is not far to seek, for it is only by the first that the other two operate. It is of course true that in common with everything to do with salvation, all the gifts operate by faith, but not in such a specific way as these. Both Healing and Miracles are a particular demonstration of faith. If we recall the Lord's words after He had calmed the storm on the lake, we shall at once acknowledge the truth of this. Having miraculously hushed the wind and stilled the waves, the Master said to His apostles, 'where is your faith?' 'How is it that you have no faith?' as though to say, 'I did this miracle by faith, so could you have done it if you had any or sufficient faith'.

We may also see the significance of faith by what the Lord said to His disciples when they asked Him why they could not cast out the devil from the epileptic boy, 'because of your unbelief', He said. Pondering upon this miracle, we find a rich combination of spirituals in operation here — Discernment, Faith, Miracles, Healing — all join together in one glorious demonstration of Wisdom, Knowledge, Love and Power in perfect Understanding: yet the one selected by the Lord for special mention was Faith.

Faith.

Here again we must be careful to differentiate between the grace of faith and the gift of Faith. Every true child of God has the former, for by it we are saved and have become spiritual, but the latter is a special spiritual impartation whereby selected people may have supernatural ability at certain times to accomplish otherwise impossible things. Some of these kinds of things are catalogued in Hebrews 11, as has been mentioned, but not all are there. It was just such a special bestowal which enabled Peter in his day to walk on the sea; that it was only transitory in effect is a pointed illustration of the position earlier spoken of: the gift itself was spiritual, but Peter at that time was not; he was carnal; he doubted and started to sink and would have drowned but for the Lord.

Let us from this incident learn the lesson which is as obvious as the storm: it is spiritual to respond immediately to the Lord's word in face of the impossible, but once having committed to it, it is carnal to calculate possibilities of achievement by relating our chances of success or failure to outward circumstances, whether they be favourable or disadvantageous. Peter lost his overwhelming sense of the Lord's presence and noticed the outer elements; that is, the elements of his own soul-life related to the elements of nature without him and not to the Spiritual Jesus. That is carnality. In its operation and outworking a gift only ever remains as spiritual as the person to whom it is given.

We may truly praise God that, following Pentecost, Peter hardly ever approached near to faithlessness again. One occasion when he did so was when he argued with the Lord upon the housetop at Joppa, which is by the seaside. However, that only happened through lack of understanding of God's ways, a common enough shortcoming for which no-one would criticise him, for 'who hath known the mind of the Lord, and who hath been His counsellor?' But to recognise the fact only grants us the opportunity of beholding the unchallengeable supremacy of Understanding.

Healings and Miracles.

What has been said of Faith may be said also of both the other gifts which with it forms the second group of three within the nine. Whether it be Healing or Miracles, every born-again child of God has some real knowledge and experience of each in grace. Who has not known the healing power and comfort of peace which passeth understanding, or of love shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit when baptised by Jesus

into His death and resurrection? And who among us that are saved cannot testify to miracles of some sort having taken place in our lives, whether in spirit, soul or body? Answers to prayer, openings of doors, supplyings of needs, all testify to the reality of the miraculous life in which God, having brought us, also now sustains us; and this is just how it should be with us all. But none of these must be mistaken for the particular gifts of which they are the grace.

For Mutual Benefit to the Glory of God

The spirituals are gifts superadded to the grace, extending the ordinary to the extraordinary, and that which is common to us all to that which is entrusted only to the few. Now although this is the case, it is so by God's will, and must be understood by us aright, for although given to the few, they are not to be regarded as specially for them so much as entrustments to the whole Body unto the benefit of all mankind and the glory of God thereby. They are worked by the selfsame Spirit that indwells all, and none need feel envious or jealous of another, for in bestowal and operation each is for mutual benefit so that while credit must be given to the member who faithfully uses the gift, the glory surely goes to Him whose Body we all are.

Prophecy, Tongues and Interpretation of Tongues.

Leaving our study of this second group of gifts, we complete our examination of the nine by examining the last three that Paul mentions here, namely Prophecy, Tongues and Interpretation of tongues. But before doing so in any categorical manner as above, it may be well at this point to attempt to dispel some errors which have arisen over the years as a result of misunderstanding, and also to dispose of the mistaken notion that man has an inalienable right, as though he were God, to pronounce his judgements upon God's ways.

It is quite impossible to understand the divine mind and become God's tutor or mentor. Carnal intellect cannot in any degree grasp spiritual truth. This is not to say that men should not make enquiries about many baffling things spoken of in the Bible; on the contrary this is exactly what they should do. But always their approach should be with reverent humility, and their search conducted in meekness, having first accepted both the genuineness of the fact, and also the good and useful purpose of the thing(s) about which they ask. Instead of doing this however, quite unwarrantably in respect of these particular gifts, so many of men's investigations are conducted upon the basis of preconceived ideas, and in the spirit of rejection. Upon enquiry it is regrettably discovered that quite often many who discuss or write about this trio either do not possess them and / or have no personal experience of their proper function.

Surely it ought to be clearly understood among us that whatever the spiritual point men may debate or argue, no-one is in a position to speak with correctness or expound with authority upon it unless he himself has a living experience of it. Too often a matter is examined theologically or from an academic viewpoint, which totally rejects certain portions of scripture incompatible with a particular interpretation. The result is that with no experience of the truth being examined, people say 'it cannot be', or, with some other equally unfair remark, cloud the issue and shirk moral responsibility. That the Bible refers to a matter and a man may collate all the relevant facts both in and out of scripture about it, is not sufficient grounds for any man to make dogmatic pronouncements about it. By God's estimate he is still in ignorance of the matter.

We Speak that we do Know

As an illustration of this simple fact, we need only refer to the hundreds of theories of and interpretations about prophetic scriptures concerning times and events to do with the second coming of the Lord Jesus. These have been heaped up and handed on over centuries and perhaps multiplied by the modern Church, but although they are so time-honoured, the Church has had to reject many of them, and rightly so. The simple reason for all this confusion of thought is that no-one has yet experienced the Second Coming. However, after the Lord has returned for His Church and we are all gathered home, every one of us will know the exact details and be authorities upon the event; by which we see that it is experience which makes a man an authoritative commentator.

No born-again child of God doubts the scriptures that speak of the Second Coming; instead he refers with joy to the certainty of it. But that is an entirely different thing from presuming to speak as though he knows with absolute certainty all about the actual fulfilment of it. If he should do so, no-one except those who indulge in fantasies would give him credence. This being so, why should a man be given credence if he presumes to

speaking dogmatically about a gift of the Spirit of which he has no personal functional experience?

This question may be quite correctly answered by saying that the illustration does not present a true analogy, for there is no present demonstration of the Second Coming in the Church, but that there is a present demonstration of these gifts (say of tongues for example) in the churches today. But is it not also true that there is a present demonstration of the dreaded disease of cancer in the world today; and does the most highly-trained scientist, whether he be pathologist or surgeon, believe that because he is a specialist he knows cancer? He certainly does not unless he has cancer. And is a victim of the dreaded disease discredited because he does not know all the theories about it? The specialist may with some precision speak about the correct ways to try to alleviate the condition, cut it out, burn it up, contain it, or whatever other treatment it may require, but he knows nothing of it within himself: in that realm he is thankfully ignorant.

Lamentably, ignorance in the realm of experience of Tongues is often similarly, perhaps cynically, regarded among some as a thing to be thankful for. Reprehensible as such an attitude is, worse than this, Paul's guidance is presumably regarded as knowledge enough upon which to attempt a campaign aimed at total elimination of the gift. We do not accept such illogical procedure on the part of scientists. Indeed they would not think of speaking and acting so senselessly; then why in the name of common sense should we accept such unethical behaviour on the part of Christians? As Jesus says, 'the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light'.

No child of God's regeneration ought to act or speak as though any gift of the Spirit is other than entirely spiritual. Even though he may know nothing of its working in personal experience, he should bear in mind the righteous principle underlying the apostle's words in another context, 'every creature of God is good and nothing to be refused.'

The Gift of Tongues.

Perhaps one further thing ought to be considered here; many such statements as the following have been made by those who oppose themselves in this matter, 'Tongues is the least important of the gifts because it appears at the bottom of the list'. This kind of saying, though perhaps sincerely thought, is as absurd as it is also untrue. It is untrue because although it occurs low down on the list it is not at the bottom. Interpretation of tongues comes last. It is absurd also because upon the second occasion when the gifts are mentioned in this chapter, Interpretation fails to appear anywhere in the list. So if this kind of illogical reasoning be used, Interpretation is in one place less than the least, and in the other non-existent.

In defence of truth it may be asked which of the things mentioned in the short list in I Corinthians 1:30, is of the least worth; Redemption, which is accorded the last place? Are not all these of equal worth, and would not many hearts perhaps say that the last is the greatest of all? This same kind of thing occurs again in verse eleven of chapter six, where of the three things mentioned, 'Justified' is spoken of last. Would it be highly improper or totally unreasonable to argue (if argue we must) that perhaps both 'Redemption' and 'Justified' occur at the bottom of their respective lists because above all others, each is the most fundamentally important truth being then mentioned?

It may not be so necessary to press the postulation as to expose the absurdity of the false reasoning from which so many objections are formed, therefore just one more illustration may suffice to reveal the folly of such thinking. The commonest vegetation upon the earth is grass, but because it is so universally common, is it therefore the least important? May it not after all be one of the greatest, if not the greatest of all? We commonly use the expression 'getting down to the grass roots', meaning penetrating down to the bottom of things, facing the real issues and finding out fundamental reasons and causes and how everything came about.

There can be little doubt that the commonest gift among us is Tongues, or that following the initial Baptism in the Spirit on the day of Pentecost it was also the first to be used, therefore, if it be reasoned that grass is more prolific and universal than any other form of vegetation because it is the most vitally necessary to animals and man, then Tongues, by the same token, is most vitally necessary to the Church. However, the point need not be pressed unto absurdity, lest the gift be done further unjustifiable harm; nevertheless we shall return to it later.

There can be no doubt that in one form or another Prophecy, Tongues and Interpretation of Tongues are the

most commonly used gifts in the churches today. This being so, as may be expected they have the greatest influence over our lives and in the end produce the most far-reaching effect upon us. Therefore we need to understand their place and function in a church as well as in the whole Body.

The Gift of Prophecy.

[Prophecy — the Mainstream](#) * [With the Spirit and Understanding](#) * [Things that Differ](#) * [... into all the World](#) * [That which is Perfect](#) * [The Chief Cornerstone](#) * [He sent Them - two by two.](#) * [The Foolishness of God is Wiser than Men](#) * [Covet the Best Gifts](#)

Following former procedure, we note the indisputable position held by Prophecy, for, as we observe, the gift heads this third and last section. Prophecy is spoken of in terms which seem unquestionably to set it above its fellows; 'follow after Love and desire spirituals, but rather that ye may prophesy', Paul says at the conclusion of the thirteenth chapter and the commencement of the fourteenth. Having already preceded the thirteenth chapter with the words 'covet earnestly the best (highest) gifts', the apostle seems to leave us with no alternative than to believe that Prophecy is the highest of 'the higher gifts', the best of the best.

Prophecy as naturally heads this section as do Wisdom and Faith their respective sections, and it holds this position for the same reasons and upon the same principle as they hold theirs. Quite certainly the apostle extols the virtues of this gift, deliberately taking up much space to set it in contrast with Tongues as being the major internal means of building up the Church. Being set in such a prominent position it appears to be greater than either Wisdom or Knowledge, which hold first and second place in the list.

This may be yet another testimony to the fact that to be last is not necessarily to be least, as well as bearing witness to the principle that the last shall be first. Or it may be just a plain indication that these nine are not set out in a strict order of merit at all, and that we ought not to look for some order of importance or value whereby to calculate the worth of one over another. That there is some plan behind the order of mention is practically certain, but we will investigate the possibility of this later.

Prophecy — the Mainstream

Prophecy is the basic gift of supernatural utterance in the mother tongue. It is the 'main stream' in which all the other oral gifts flow, for whether they be words of Wisdom or Knowledge or Interpretation, to be 'oracles of God' (1 Peter 4:11) all must be prophetic in substance, nature and manner of utterance. It would be as impossible for any man to have and function in the Word of Wisdom, apart from having the gift of Prophecy as it is impossible for a hand to exist without an arm. Although unlikely, it may be true that a member of the Body obviously operates in the Word of Wisdom, but is never known to give ordinary prophecies, but this in no way invalidates the fact that his gift only operates on the main stream of prophetic utterance. And if the function of Prophecy is edification, can it possibly be imagined that anything is more able to build up the Church than Wisdom spoken in love?

We are told in the book of Proverbs that 'Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars', a clear enough testimony to her powers of edification. And who would say that the book of Proverbs which is itself a compilation of Words of Wisdom is not wholly conceived and delivered as Prophetic utterance? Words of Wisdom or of Knowledge are special utterances within the main scheme of prophetic ministry and conferred upon selected members who as a general rule hold or are being prepared by God to hold leading offices in the churches.

In chapter 14 Paul says, 'ye all may prophesy one by one', plainly implying that all the members may have and use the gift of Prophecy. It appears from this that in the gatherings Prophecy should be quite common, in fact the basic form of utterance among the children of God when gathered together for worship or ministry. Seeing that the main purpose in gathering is edification, the Church needs more than occasional utterances of rare pearls of wisdom and treasures of knowledge, great and wonderful and invaluable as they are. Therefore, beside these, the Lord has placed in the Church a whole array of commoner, though not less spiritual words of blessing, comfort, love, help, guidance, instruction and such like; these are all absolutely necessary and must be ministered by the members one to another, either through the gift of Prophecy proper or in prophetic vein.

With the Spirit and Understanding

Having acquainted ourselves of these things, we must note that the real purpose for Paul's emphasis upon the superiority of Prophecy enables a man to speak in the Church with both his spirit and his understanding, and is set here in contrast with speaking with Tongues. This is because when speaking with Tongues only the spirit of a man is engaged, his understanding remains entirely inoperative and unfruitful. Considering this, it is at once obvious why Tongues is inferior to Prophecy. Tongues is only a specific demonstration of prophetic utterance, but Prophecy is the overall gift, capable of universal adaptability to any situation needing divine thought and pronouncement, and is profitable to the intelligence of both speaker and hearer alike.

Herein lies the superiority of the latter over the former. Both these gifts are given by God to be the basic media of all unprepared, unpremeditated utterances spoken directly in the churches by Him throughout the length of this age. There are also other forms of speech which are sanctified and used by God, such as preaching, teaching, counselling etc., which are for use both in and out of church gatherings, and to be effective for God all of these must to some degree have a prophetic quality about them. But none of them is to be confused in thought with the special gift of Prophecy, any more than they are ever imagined to be the gift of Tongues.

It is as manifestly unwarrantable to think or say that God intends us to believe that the gift of Prophecy is really nothing other than preaching, as it is wholly improper and incredibly stupid to say that the gift of Tongues is only Preaching in other languages. Although Prophecy and Tongues (with Interpretation) are most often expressed in the form of preaching, that is as declarations unto men, they are no more Preaching than Preaching is Prophesying, even though in course of utterance at times preaching partakes of a prophetic nature.

Things that Differ

The student of scripture requires no more to convince him that Prophesying and Preaching are two different ministries than to observe the specific use of carefully chosen words by the New Testament writers when speaking of the two ministries. By inspiration of the Holy Ghost, words of entirely different root and meaning were used for Prophecy and Preaching. Preaching covers such a vast field of expression that in order to show the fullness of the meaning of the ministry a great variety of words are used by God, but the word for Prophecy stands unchanged throughout. Words translated Preaching can mean 'to evangelise' or 'to announce as a herald', or to speak in normal conversation, such as to gossip or engage in small talk, but not so Prophecy; this word partakes of none of those meanings, but remains uniformly 'Prophecy' whenever it is found in the New Testament. It is quite proper to translate either of the words meaning 'to announce as a herald' or 'to evangelise' as 'preaching' or 'to preach', but totally wrong to translate them as 'prophesying' or 'to prophesy'. Having taken such care to distinguish between these things, God rightfully expects His people to take note of His carefulness and not confuse things that differ.

.... into all the World

Here we will pause to recollect the fact that the early Church never had the Bible as we have it today, and that this is especially true of the Gentile churches. Being cut off from the Hebrew scriptures which were kept and read in the synagogues and as yet being without possession of any New Testament writings, the saints had no canonical book to which to turn or from which to preach or expound. It may therefore at once be seen why the oral gifts were of such importance to them.

In the beginning the Church accepted in earnest its God-given task of world evangelisation and the result was rapid expansion. Churches sprang up and multiplied, so that although other apostles in addition to the original twelve were raised up, these proved altogether too few to meet the requirements created by such speedy and powerful developments. Therefore letters were written, biographies were made and history recorded; but although these were precious, they were just rare fragmentary scraps. So in order to preserve them before they were lost, the majority were copied out and eventually collected and put together. Finally these were joined with the Old Testament and together became our present Bible. But all this took centuries of time during which there was no common inspired record to which to turn and a decreasing number of apostles of original calibre to preach with reliable authority or authentic revelation.

Small wonder then that the powers of speech and works which were originally ministered by the Lord, and

then by His apostles, were after His departure distributed by the Lord among the members of His Body. To these He later added the whole Bible so that being fully equipped we should be able in these latter days to stand and represent Him on the earth with power and authority and understanding. But because this is so, it must not be imagined that as we now have the Bible we have no need of the gifts of the Spirit.

That which is Perfect

Some have erroneously thought that when God gave to the Church the completed canon of scripture He did so with a view to the withdrawal of His spiritual gifts, making one the substitute for the other. Going farther, some have said that this is what is intended to be understood from the word 'perfect' in verse 10 of chapter 13, 'when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away'. But this is obviously not so, because:

- (a) it presupposes that God only gave the gifts as a substitute for the Bible, which just is not true;
- (b) it assumes that the Bible is 'that which is perfect', whereas we know from internal evidence that the Bible is incomplete. There are at least three letters of Paul's missing, beside some works by prophets of the Old Testament. The Bible is not in that sense 'perfect' although it is perfect enough for God's purposes by it among men in this age;
- (c) by inference it brands all present-day operations of the gifts as false, a notion which is so shudderingly near to blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, that except Peter's generous words 'I wot that through ignorance ye did it, brethren' avail today for men who say such things, all hope would be lost, for it is the Holy Ghost who works these gifts in the Body of Christ;
- (d) it loses sight of the truth that the Church is His many-membered Body and His Body cannot lose its innate natural abilities;
- (e) it totally ignores the words of the apostle in I Corinthians 1:7, where he says that while waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus, the Church is to come behind in no gift, plainly implying that the gifts shall remain in the Church which is His Body until the second coming of Christ. When this event takes place 'that which is perfect will come', for it will mark the consummation of the age;
- (f) it fails to accept the statement in 12:28, that without any time note or limit God hath set men with their gifts in the Church.

We see then that the Bible as we know it was added to the Church and owes its existence to the Church. This is because partly it came through the Church and exists in its present format and wholeness by the design and labours of the Church. It is well also to remember that the Church is greater than the Bible, and when the Bible shall cease to be, the Church shall still be. It will then have no need of the special gifts nor of the temporary gifts, such as Tongues and Interpretation and Prophecy and Discerning of spirits and Healing and Miracles and the Bible. These all being partial, shall be done away, and the perfect and complete Church shall abide eternally.

The Chief Cornerstone

In the text last mentioned, Paul in various ways categorically numbers and classifies men and gifts and functions into five divisions. In the first he groups all the apostles; in the second the prophets; in the third the teachers; in the fourth miracles; but in the fifth he groups together gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Much may be said about the reasons for this grouping, but refraining for the present from doing that, we note that Paul hereby reveals the high esteem in which the gift of Prophecy was held by the early Church. He places prophets second only to apostles and before teachers and everyone else holding office in the Church, thereby showing not only their respective value, but also their true position.

We are also made aware of this by scriptures which tell us that the Church is 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone'. The grouping here is First: Jesus Christ, Second: apostles, Third: prophets, and shows that next to the Lord are the apostles and next to, though with the apostles, the prophets — 'the apostles and prophets'. This is the mind of the Lord. Reading scripture, it becomes apparent that the prophet in his office was a person who could do, and often did, more than make prophetic utterances.

However, the importance of the gift of Prophecy over all others is indicated by the fact that the office did not take its name from any of the other gifts or ministries which the prophet may have or operate, but from this one. He may have healed people, but he was not called Healer. He may have given words of wisdom, but he did not take any name associated with wisdom, nor was he called by a name which had for its root or ground

any other gift but this particular one, Prophecy. He was called a Prophet because he held the office and functioned in the ministry of a prophet administering the gift of Prophecy. In other words, as indicated by the name of the office, Prophecy was considered to be greater than any of the other gifts or any combination of those gifts.

Thinking of the great man Elijah, we take the point that although he performed miracles and spoke words of wisdom and had great knowledge, he was not spoken of as the healer, or the miracle-worker, or power-man, but as the prophet Elijah. On the other hand we discover that others who were not men of God accepted the title Magi, which name is the word for Wise-man. A man of God knows that the greatest gift he can receive from God is power to speak the word of God direct from God, so in order to be equipped for this he covets the gift of Prophecy, for it is exactly for this reason that the gift is given.

He sent Them - two by two.

It is an outstanding feature of Paul's missionary journeys that he mostly travelled with a prophet as a companion. By this means wherever they went the whole complement of gifts and ministries normally to be found in a local church were always available. Between them these two offices comprise the fullness of all that is needed to bring churches into being and establish them according to the will of God. That is why they are spoken of as foundations.

Reading scripture we notice in the Gospels that the Lord originally instituted the practice of sending out His apostles two by two, but in the early Church this soon gave way to the practice of combining prophet with apostle. In fact it seems that the last occasion when two of the original apostles travelled together was for the founding of the church in Samaria. This original formation was subsequently varied when, after the apostles Barnabas and Saul had teamed up for their first missionary enterprise, Paul later exchanged his companion for Silas, a prophet. There is no reason to suppose that although this practice became customary with these men, it became law in the Church, but it is an indication of the Church's estimation of the place and power of the prophet among them.

The Foolishness of God is Wiser than Men

There can be no doubt of the superiority of and preference for Prophecy above Tongues in founding, building and upbuilding churches, but because this is true, prophecy by no means outweighs or displaces its kindred gift. Paul indicates that Tongues with Interpretation can be of equal effectiveness with Prophecy in the Church. If we understand scripture aright, Tongues is not to be disparaged or slighted. Paul did not write against the gift, but against its abuse — a very different thing.

It was only that because of sin the Corinthians were behaving themselves childishly with the gifts, and for this reason he wrote as he did. The reason why he laid down his strictures upon the misuse of Tongues is because of all the gifts, Tongues can most easily be a cover for undetected sin and the flesh and the devil. Therein lies the greatest danger attached to the gift. Tongues can be an expression of childish nonsense or foolish pride; in fact they can be a manifestation and exhibition of almost anything or everything that dishonours God. Wrongly held and used the gift militates against the very reason for which God called us all in the beginning, which Paul plainly states in chapter 1 verse 29 — 'That no flesh should glory in His presence'.

Tongues is one of the 'foolish things of this world'; like the Lord who gave it, it is despised and rejected of men and has been placed in the Church by God for the purpose of destroying the wisdom of the wise. It is intended to accentuate the cross in the Body of Christ, and rightly used this is exactly what it accomplishes. Tongues requires the cross to make it spiritual in nature and powerful in effect. When used in the power of the cross, this gift, perhaps more than any other, reveals that the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption of God are wholly contrary to man and his pompous wisdom, which is just what God wishes to accomplish.

Covet the Best Gifts

Consider the words of Paul in chapter 14 — 'I would that ye all spoke with tongues'. Although he goes on to say 'but rather that ye prophesied', and gives his reasons for so saying, this further statement does not invalidate or in any way diminish the power of the opening words. He was not saying, nor must he be

misinterpreted to mean, 'do not speak with tongues; prophesy'. He said 'I would that ye all spoke with tongues', and he meant it. Lower down he says, 'I thank God that I speak with tongues more than ye all', and considering the fact that he was correcting a church of multiple and undisciplined tongues-speakers, that really is a tremendous claim.

In both these instances he uses the word 'rather'; in the first it comes as 'but rather that ye prophesied', and in the second as 'yet in the Church I would rather speak five words with my understanding ... than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue'. Now 'rather' is part of an adverbial phrase referring to preference; it has nothing to do with prohibition. Indeed he finishes the section with the instruction 'forbid not to speak with tongues', leaving that as his final commandment from God to them about it. Instead of barring the gift, he is here stating his preferences both for himself and them in ministry in the Church, and all he says is entirely consistent with the spirit in which he earlier urged them to 'covet earnestly the best gifts'.

But contrary to the manner of some, in order to exalt the highest and best, he does not falsely demean or discount that which may have a lesser function or be more common in use. He does not say, 'I refuse to speak in Tongues', neither does he say 'you should not speak with Tongues', in fact he says exactly the opposite, 'I want you all to speak with Tongues'. We also understand him as saying, 'I want to teach and edify others, so I would rather speak with my understanding'. He is desirous that the wealth of accumulated knowledge he possesses may be applied with understanding to his brothers and sisters, so he wishes to speak to them in his mother tongue with words easy to be understood.

This classic passage on teaching is unquestionably a reference to prophetic ministry and not to preaching or Bible teaching. He is dealing with the gifts of the Spirit, each of which when truly used is by divine inspiration springing spontaneously within the spirit of the person, coming through direct from God, unpremeditated both in inception and delivery. Such ministry is plainly understood both by the speaker and the hearer, but although given in understanding, it does not spring from the speaker's knowledge, although in course of delivery it at times takes up, mixes in, uses and applies that knowledge. At such times the minister is conscious that his stored-up knowledge is being used and spoken forth, but he is also aware that it is not by his own powers of mental selection.

What generally happens upon such occasions is that the Spirit takes of what He has formerly revealed, adds more, and pours it forth at will through that member. The man is not doing this as from himself; the Spirit is drawing upon the local reserves of knowledge which He has previously stored up in a man's heart ready for use as He desires. His is the revelation, His the knowledge, His the power, His the selection and application and His the responsibility for the utterance. It would be quite foreign to His method, as well as to the rest of the chapter if, without warning, the apostle should suddenly have changed from his exposition of what is all of God, to something which is mostly of man. Normal teaching results from stores of knowledge laboriously acquired by man, carefully checked and researched and stated in an orderly manner, but Paul was not referring to that when he spoke of teaching in this passage.

Rather he means and intends us to understand the kind and quality of ministry of which we have an example in Acts 2 — sheer prophetic statement, informative and revelatory, spontaneously flowing from God. By his inspired knowledge Peter certainly taught others also that day, and while speaking prophetically to them in his own mother tongue, he, as well as they, gathered fruit in his own understanding. Although earlier, together with all the others, he had been given utterance in one or some of the other tongues distributed among them, for the purposes of teaching others, he leaves his newly-acquired gift and moves back into his native Aramaic tongue that by his understanding he should teach others also.

However, although this is a factual account of a historic event, Paul when writing to the Corinthians later does not intend to imply that Prophecy has any superiority over Tongues in respect of quality of gift, as though we should infer from his remarks that Tongues are well-nigh valueless in the Church. All too often it is willingly assumed from a misunderstanding of 14:19, that Tongues has no value, purpose, sense or scriptural place in teaching or edifying the Church. But Paul plainly intimates in verse 6 that speaking with tongues (with interpretation: verse 5) in the Church can be as good a media of revelation, knowledge, prophetic power and doctrine as Prophecy. If a man with Tongues adds Interpretation to his gift, he thereby brings Tongues on to a par with Prophecy; doing so he will then excel to the edifying of the church, verse 12.

The inferiority of the gift (compared) to Prophecy lies purely in the realm of personal understanding; it does

not lie in any imagined inferiority of quality or nature of the gift. When God gives the gifts He does not deceive people by giving stone for bread, or serpents for fish or scorpions for eggs. 'Tongues' is not of the nature of the devil (the serpent), or demons (scorpions), or man (stone), it is as pure and holy and spiritual as the Word of Wisdom or any of the higher functions. In common with all the other gifts it may be used by the devil, or demons or man, and so also may preaching and teaching; in fact everything. If we are men of understanding we shall recognise the fact that God can as easily give a word of wisdom by Tongues and Interpretation as by Prophecy.

How important then it is to see that God has based the whole construction of gifts for the body upon this foundation. By Tongues and Interpretation the prophet learns that upon occasions his gift is not indispensable; the apostle himself thanks God that he has the ability to speak with tongues more than all.

Tongues is a gift of God, totally in keeping with the humbling, debasing powers of the cross and His deliberate intentions in and through the Body of Christ in a world full of the wisdom and pride of men. Perhaps a further illustration of this may not be without value here. Paul speaks with peculiar insistence about 'our uncomely parts', reminding us that upon these we all bestow more abundant honour than we do upon the comely parts. Without putting too fine a point on it, we all realise the undeniable and indispensable importance of the function of the uncomely parts of the body and would freely admit that if these did not function aright there could be no comely parts. Carrying the analogy over to the gifts, we find no difficulty in identifying the 'uncomely' one among them — Tongues.

Comeliness, by reason of its own intrinsic inner fitness, is a prepossessing quality appealing to our powers of perception and appreciation. Used here, it is an acknowledgement of cosmic beauty, of the rightness and correctness of something in fitting relationship to the whole. It is just here that Tongues seems to be all wrong. To the natural man (2:24), it is uncomely; it just does not seem to fit in with the whole; it sounds foreign, so it is an offence to his aesthetic sense, for there seems to be no reason for it. But Paul says it is upon the uncomely part that the more abundant honour is bestowed. Here then we may find one of the reasons for its abundance and honour in the Church.

It is noteworthy that the one occasion recorded in scripture when the Lord spoke unintelligible words which were misunderstood and misinterpreted by those who heard Him was when He hung upon the cross. We may be sure that John, who records them, did not understand them any more than the educated Roman Centurion who stood there with his soldiers at the time. When, later, the interpretation was given, and inscribed in scripture, everybody understood, but at the time when Jesus spoke, no-one knew what He was saying. Of course the words that Jesus spoke were a known language to Him, but without interpretation it was as totally unknown to those around Him then as to us for whose sake the interpretation was added.

The idea of Tongues is therefore seen to be associated with Jesus upon the cross, when He hung there an uncomely 'thing', a spectacle to God, men, devils and angels. Aesthetically the crucifixion is nauseating, artistically it is obnoxious, culturally it is barbaric, yet who will say that Calvary is spiritually uncomely or that cosmically it is not absolutely right, or that it is not intrinsically perfect? We, with God, bestow upon Calvary the most abundant honour, even though all the most bestial horrors were perpetrated there upon the man who then appeared to be less than the least of all — a worm and no man. Even so with Tongues. It is only uncomely to those who have hid as it were their faces from it and for some excuse or another wholly unacceptable in heaven, have despised, denigrated or denied it.

Sadly enough some people refuse to have anything to do with the gift simply because those who defend its genuineness often do so upon the wrong grounds. This is unfortunate and we sympathise with all those who have had to endure these dogmatic outpourings, but none must think that he may be excused because of this. To insist upon giving Tongues a position or meaning other than the scriptures anywhere directly state is a sure way to bring the gift into disrepute. For instance by calling Tongues the initial evidence of the Baptism in the Spirit, zealots have harmed their cause. But any man who upon such flimsy excuses refuses God's gift is not less reprehensible than he who sometimes because of ignorance repeats the error and harangues the listener with the spurious claims being advanced.

To be sure the protagonists for initial evidence are wrong, but are they who allow themselves to be 'put off' by such extravagant claims any the less wrong? Suffice it to say that nowhere in the Book does any man say that a person must speak with tongues before he can claim to be baptised in the Spirit, and that ought to be

accepted by all men; we must not allow preference to colour assumption about it. The scriptures neither state in words, nor do they support the idea, nor do they in any way imply, that Tongues is the initial evidence of Baptism in the Spirit (see [***link pamphlet on the theory of Initial Evidence](#)).

A very real and simple reason why Tongues is so widely distributed among people baptised in Spirit is because fundamentally it has such a useful function to the individual. Paul states that he who speaks in an unknown tongue edifieth himself, and who will deny that this is of vital necessity to each one of us? It is such a pity that all too often people have misconstrued the apostle's words of correction in chapter 14 to mean that the possession and use of Tongues is at best a mistake on God's part.

Although Paul strongly reproveth the abuse of Tongues, he never once said anything which allows the suggestion that any of God's precious gifts are other than most beneficial when received and used with understanding and love. Understood aright the gift of Tongues must be confessed to be of great blessing both to the individual who has it and also to the Church privileged to have that person as one of its members. Behold the wisdom and love of God in this. Tongues is given by Him to be an instrument of edification to the person to whom it is entrusted. It is a personal love gift, an entrustment to understanding, and it is to a person's understanding that the whole of this epistle is directed.

Understanding persons easily recognise that Tongues are not a sign to the insider but are only to be used in this capacity to the outsider. They therefore hold and use the gift with restraint in the presence of the outsider, and for this reason: the outsider knows that speech in an unknown tongue to a group of men of one nation gathered together for worship is normally incomprehensible. If therefore he sees and hears all or even most of such a congregation speaking in languages unknown to each other, he will think such people must be without sense. For 'why', he will reason, 'do people speak in unknown languages when their purpose for coming together is to inform, teach, build up and communicate with each other? There must be something wrong with these people', he will say. If it be said to him that Tongues are intended to be a sign of God's presence and power, he will think 'how is it that they who talk about being baptised into God need signs to prove the presence of God to each other? They are mad!'

Without controversy such a common sense attitude would be quite correct. Why give signs when signs are not needed? Why do people who know and are already God's children revert to signs when plain language is understood? Lack of understanding is a serious handicap among God's children, marring many meetings and bringing precious things into disrepute. What is worse is that such misbehaviour is only a symptom of deeper trouble, much more serious than the resulting nauseous manifestation. That is why Paul starts at the beginning with the cross: all the sin which gave rise to the dreadful abuse of the gifts is dealt with there, and can be dealt with by no other means.

It is true that Tongues are for a sign, but they must not be used as a sign to the instructed who have no need of signs. They have a precious ministry to the Church providing they are used with understanding in a controlled and limited manner, and, together with Interpretation, can prove to be most beneficial in building up the people. The most fundamental thing to grasp about Tongues is that the gift is imparted to be the means of self-edification. Contrary to what is sometimes implied by well-meaning folk, God is most desirous that men should possess this means of building up their own spiritual strength. He has planned it this way so that by building up himself, each individual may in turn make the fullest possible contribution to the whole.

A homely, common enough illustration may not come amiss here. What mother would be considered wrong and out of order if she was discovered to be eating food? Should she be reprimanded if she eats food like the rest of the family to whom she has devoted herself in love? Surely the greatest contribution she can possibly make to the rest of the family which comprises her body of love is to stay alive and well and strong so that she may constantly attend upon her acknowledged ministry of love. If she does not feed and build up herself, will she long be able to feed others? Would not all the family lovingly reprove her for neglecting herself should she mistakenly refrain from eating? Even so, the gift of Tongues is given as a special love-gift to the children of God that by its proper use each one who receives it may build up himself for the greater ministry of love and devotion to the whole body of love.

Interpretation of Tongues.

Having for the purposes stated dealt fairly fully, though not exhaustively, with the gift of Tongues, we will

turn to a consideration of Interpretation. Perhaps little more need be said about it than has already been said, for by its very nature it is linked with Tongues and owes its existence to it. Without its much despised 'twin' gift, there would be no need for it in the body. Behold the loving wisdom and perfect understanding of God intended by this gift. It is a tender reminder of the selflessness of the Christ's body, for it is given that members may pass on to others the blessing which has been peculiarly their own and could not be ministered to others' conscious understandings apart from the gift. Like its fellows, Interpretation is a most loving and tender gesture from the Lord.

Interpretation is not a gift which is peculiar to the New Testament Church. In the Old Testament we discover that such men as Daniel had the ability to interpret dreams, visions and languages (tongues). Indeed this man had such a variety of abilities that it is not surprising that he was raised to Premiership. Joseph also had the gift of Interpretation, though apparently he did not, as Daniel, have the ability to interpret languages (tongues). Nevertheless there is difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, and this difference is indicated in the special title given to the New Testament gift, namely Interpretation of Tongues.

The hand which wrote on the wall in the palace of Babylon spelled out the king's doom in a language other than his own. It was written in a tongue which was unknown to everybody including Daniel himself, but the Hebrew Prophet both spelled out the faded words and also interpreted their meaning to the king in full and miraculous detail. This however was an incident without precedent or repetition in the Old Testament scriptures, and appears upon its pages in marked isolation, whereas dreams and visions are not strange to the record.

With the advent of the New Covenant on the day of Pentecost, God revealed His hitherto unknown intention to distribute Tongues with liberality throughout the whole Church during the entire Church age. By doing this He also created a need, so in fulfilment of this specific need the Lord also bestowed with it the gift of Interpretation of Tongues.

Paul is very specific about this gift, he does not speak of Interpretation apart from adding 'of Tongues'. He did this lest the gift should be mistaken for prophecy. Interpretation of languages is a common enough ability among men. There are many people who have a natural 'flair' for languages and are brilliant at translating or interpreting one language or dialect into another, having great linguistic abilities and a well-trained mind. But this is not what Paul is speaking of. By Interpretation of Tongues he means an ability complete in itself, given from God and owing nothing to education. People with this gift have no need of training, although in some degree it will improve with use.

The difference between these two kinds of interpretation is best seen by observing the methods each uses. Normal interpretation depends upon clear understanding of the words being spoken and is given sentence by sentence as the speaker proceeds. The gift of God is entirely opposite to that: the interpreter has no knowledge of the 'Tongue' being spoken, he waits until the speaker has completed the whole message and then gives the interpretation as an utterance complete in itself. Neither the speaker in Tongues nor the interpreter of the Tongue understands the words spoken in Tongue.

In common with all the oral gifts, Interpretation of Tongues functions by direct inspiration from God; it is a 'Spiritual'. As to its operational method, that is, how it works within him, the interpreter does not know, 'Tongues' as revealed in scripture is Spirit (God) to spirit (man) by (Holy) Spirit through (a) man's spirit to Spirit (God), and is quite intelligible to Him. Interpretation of Tongues is from Spirit via, man's spirit to man's spirit and understanding. Finally understanding must be reached and edified, so God has given Interpretation of Tongues in a language understandable to others.

It will be seen then that of all the Spirituals, Tongues is the one gift which on man's side is most exclusively spiritual in operation. Except upon the rare occasion of which the day of Pentecost is an example, when Tongues are spoken nothing of what is said is understandable to man. In general all that men know of the gift in operation is that something has been spoken, that is all. This ability must be operated by spirit alone, and because this is so, in the last analysis by this gift every church must be judged.

Although this may at first appear strange to the mind, it is by the presence, practice and power of Tongues that the true state of any company is made apparent and must be adjudged spiritual or carnal. It is not that of all the Spirituals Tongues is the greatest, but because it is the simplest in operation, requiring nothing of man but his

spirit and tongue, with obedience and faith. All God requires is the simple, intelligent co-operation of which every new-born babe is capable; once this is known to a heart, to deny that to God is almost unpardonable. No gift is more entirely spiritual in function, nor more easily operated than this, therefore if carnality is entertained in a church, this is the gift which suffers first and most, for it is the most directly expressive of the spiritual state of man. It is a spirit exercise, a spirit utterance, more it is a spirit expression, and to the discerning spirit nothing is more clearly indicative of the state of the person(s) speaking. Therefore ultimately either by its use, abuse or non-use the true condition of any church is revealed.

We have already noted some of the more serious sins which worked among the Corinthians like leaven in dough. Because of their blatant defiance of God's ordinances and their consequent criminal disregard for each other, all discernment had ceased from the majority, so that, despite the liberal distribution of the higher gifts among them, many were weak and sickly and many slept. Healing, Miracles, Discernment of spirits, Faith, had all been given in possession to this church, but all were insufficient to meet the crying need that Paul knew to be there. Their former spirituality had been dethroned by carnality because the cross had been made of none effect, so impotence mocked their possessions and ministries, and emptiness their utterances. They had reigned as kings, but not now, and all because they had failed to accept, even if they recognised, the plain signs displayed by the abuse of Tongues in their midst.

This declension was all so needless, and Paul, with all his genius for using simple, homely illustrations, shows us this in chapter 14. In one of his most easily understood passages he draws our attention here to sounds and voices. Things without life can make noises, he says, and the instruments from which the sounds proceed are immediately recognisable; no intelligent grown person confuses a wind instrument with a stringed or a percussion instrument. From this basic idea he proceeds to draw a simple analogy and to apply some important lessons for us all to learn, namely these: when the oral gifts are in operation, the first thing to listen for is: (1) the voice, not the words; (2) the tone of the voice; (3) the volume of sound, and (4) what is being said. By this simple practice recommended by the apostle, priority is accorded to the voice first and to the message last. As will be seen, by this means the messenger is tested before his message is received. What a safety device this is.

Whatever be the speech of the man, whoever he be, the voice of that man is the surest indication of his spirit. A man's voice and tones reveal who and what he is. Although the Tongue is not known, the voice must without fail be immediately classified and understood. Whose and what spirit is being manifested, not what is being said, is of the first and utmost importance to the Church. In applying the test, certain invariable things must always be watched for, namely: (1) is it the one and selfsame Spirit spoken of in chapter 12? (2) is it the one and selfsame Love revealed in chapter 13? (3) is the tone of the selfsame quality as that which so adoringly worships Jesus, saying 'Jesus, Lord'?

Everyone must distinguish whether the voice which purports to speak from the Head on the throne is the same as that which speaks from the Body on the cross. Whether it be in the selfless pleading tones of 'Father forgive them' or the authoritative assurance of 'Today thou shalt be with me in paradise', or the tender compassion of 'Mother, behold thy Son', and 'son behold thy mother', or the heartbreaking misery and breathtaking mystery of 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' or the victorious 'It is finished', or the earth-shattering, rock-rending, grave-opening, gentle yieldedness of 'Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit'. If it be so, it is genuine, and its message acceptable; it is spiritual; whether it be whisper or shout, it is God.

This is true of all the gifts, but these things are ignored only at peril where Tongues are concerned, for they cannot be judged upon any other basis. Be sure that though a carnal person may know these things, when expressing himself among spiritual people, he cannot long disguise the condition of his spirit, nor for ever deceive the elect in this realm.

In relation to this, it is unavoidable at times that in the most spiritual of assemblies the kind of situation mentioned below may develop: a person may operate one of the commoner gifts completely in and from the soul(ish) realm, with the result that spiritual men are nauseated and saddened, yet at the same time some person may claim to have been greatly blessed by the demonstration. This kind of situation can cause great confusion and perplexity, but the difficulty is resolved when it is clearly understood that what comes from (a) soul can, and quite frequently does bless and minister to (a) soul, but only that which comes from the Holy Spirit will reach and bless the spiritual man.

The unsanctified human soul normally gratifies itself upon religious promises, ideas, suggestions, explanations and pleasurable feelings ministered to it from and by other souls. It will feed on and enjoy pseudo-spiritual exercises, quite oblivious to what is going on, and totally blinded to the spirit-source from whence it all comes. This is quite normal and totally unavoidable in the unregenerate state which precedes New Birth in every man, or the state of carnality to which a man may afterwards sink. In effect carnality in the Church is nothing other than soulishness, which, although it be now religious, is nothing other than a reversion to and continuance in that from which it was originally saved. It is a spiritual death during which the soul sleeps (Ephesians 5:14) so deeply that it is quite unable to recognise or receive the things of the Spirit. It can and does however receive that which comes from the soul, delighting in and professing blessing from it. Once this is understood, much that puzzles many hearts is immediately explainable.

It is quite impossible to overemphasise the necessity to excise from the Church the soulish, unspiritual use of Tongues, for its undisciplined use genders even worse troubles. For example: A speaks in tongue, but not from the Spirit, B has the gift of Interpretation of Tongues; because A has spoken, pressure is immediately brought to bear upon B to give an interpretation. Should he be a carnal man, or not sufficiently taught of God, he may attempt to use his gift; if he does so, he also will be out of the Spirit, and all will be in the soulish realm, carnal; dead and death-dealing.

By such devilish devices whole congregations are brought under falsehood and much confusion arises, making what was at first bad thoroughly evil in portent. Moreover, once allowed and accepted, such practices will become habitual in a church, and if continued in will forge around unsuspecting hearts a yoke of bondage almost impossible to break. Worse than that, the practice will furnish just the correct grounds for ever-watchful evil spirits to come in undetected and work their deceptions with destructive power among the saints. Sooner or later such a state of affairs will without fail result in men becoming demon-possessed; what is worse, passing for Spirit-filled believers, these persons will set odd or unbecoming patterns of behaviour in the churches which will ultimately be accepted as the only genuine manifestation of the Baptism in the Spirit among that company.

However, although this is all tragically possible, and too frequently true, it is no reason for wholesale rejection of the Spirituals, nor for the denial of this particular gift, for the same may be said of other gifts, whether charismatic or otherwise. Together with its 'twin' or 'other half', namely Interpretation, Tongues forms a good foundation for the operation of the higher gifts.

Viewing the gifts as a whole, and remembering that with the exception of the latter two they are an analysis or itemising of the composite powers whereby the Lord Himself, in His day, worked among men, it is possible to almost descry in them the outline of the image of Jesus, a kind of structure of the powers upon which the whole frame of His working or ministry-life was built. His nature is revealed in chapter 13, and compared with it all the gifts or powers are as naught, having no meaning or worth except as they are manifestations of that Love-nature. Nevertheless the Lord is as much revealed in His works as in His nature, for His works are:

- (1) an expression of His nature:
- (2) a manifestation of His spirit:
- (3) a demonstration of His power.

In the order of mention here we may see an outline somewhat analogous to a body-shape, having Wisdom as its head, Knowledge as its neck, Faith its chest, Healing and Miracles its two arms, Prophecy its heart, Discernment its trunk or torso, and Tongues with Interpretation its two legs and feet. To the seven powers by which He continuously worked during His earthly ministry, the Lord added two more and gave all to His bodily Church through which He still works among men to this day. The latter two are too widely spread among us to be overlooked, and may well merit the description accorded them above, namely the two legs and feet upon which the whole body stands.

If this privilege be granted these particular gifts, their acceptance and use among us in this capacity must be upon the understanding that they also betoken and carry the presence of the whole. Feet and legs of themselves, important as they are in their place and function, are surely not the most important members of the body. After all, it is quite possible for a person to exist without legs, but it is not possible for legs to exist apart from being members of a personal body. The whole must exist together as one, for that is the will and provision of God. Although it is graciously stated that the head cannot say to the feet, 'I have no need of thee', God is only speaking to the Body about itself from the standpoint of the ethics of life eternal. He has planned

and created the body so, and therefore all must be as He wills.

If therefore we may accept the above-suggested analogy we observe that Tongues and Interpretation do have an importance which must be regarded as necessary and fundamental to the Body for its proper function, and that being so, they are without question of the correct spiritual order. Looking and listening around in these days, it might be sadly concluded that instead of the head saying to the feet, 'I have no need of thee', it appears to be true that the feet are saying to the head, 'I have no need of thee'. Of course no-one would think of saying such a blasphemous thing, but that is how it seems to be working out, for in the majority of churches where the gifts are given expression, the higher gifts are markedly lacking in evidence.

In such churches it seems that it is generally believed that the correct approach to corporate worship is public engagement in free exercise of Tongues on the part of every member, to be followed later by an Interpretation of a more specific 'message' in Tongues. By such means it would appear that the assembly is trying to establish the belief that the feet are more important than the Head, which of course cannot be true, nor do such assemblies intend to convey this idea, but ultimately this is the inevitable impression which is unavoidably given. This is so obviously different from the order which is clearly set forth in this list of gifts. Therein it appears that the Spirit of the Body would rather manifest itself as it were from the Head downwards than from the feet upwards.

It is logical to assume and therefore may be presumed that if the feet and legs of a person are in the midst of an assembly, then so must the rest of that person be there also, even though nothing more of that person's presence and powers ever finds expression upon that or any other occasion. But would it not be more wonderful if churches could 'see' the Head more often than the feet and legs? Oh, for the expression of words of Wisdom and Knowledge among us, more than just the repetitious use of worshipping or communicating Tongues so widespread in the churches. Not that we would eliminate the gift, indeed we must not do so, but following Paul's instructions, we ought to control it.

It would seem that in three ways the apostle sought to promote the healthy growth of the Body by:

- 1) controlling the use of the less important gifts,
- 2) exhorting us to 'covet earnestly the higher gifts,
- 3) pointing out what should be our purpose in possessing and using whatever gift(s) we have.

When commanding decency and order among us he does so in two different realms. The first is to set limits to public use of Tongues whereby also he limits Interpretation of Tongues, and the second is to draw attention to the way he has deliberately arranged the order and manner in which the Spirit of the Body would minister the powers of the Lord. By means of the greater gifts, the Spirit of the Body expresses to the Body as from and within the Body, that our glorious Head is speaking.

It must surely be for this reason that Paul instructs us all that we are to hold the Head. All speech is expressed through the Head. No member of the body is endowed with power of speech save the head. Therefore it must be assumed that whatsoever the body would say is spoken by the lips of the body which are in the head. The body itself cannot speak, it is the person, the spirit within or of the body which speaks. Therefore it ought to be properly understood by each member of the Body that when he functions in a gift he is implying that it is the Head who is speaking or acting.

This is why Peter when speaking of judgement commencing at the house of God, says 'if any man speak, let him speak as the oracle of God'. Plainly he is saying that God's judgement is that unless anyone is speaking as the Head, he ought not to speak at all in the church. When it is recalled that the apostle was not thinking in terms of modern church function, but was pronouncing upon church conduct in his day, when expression through the gifts was normal church order, his forthright statement becomes the more powerful. These men lived in clear understanding of truth. They perfectly understood the mystery of the Body.

Matthew records that the first word which Jesus spoke about the Church was 'I will build my Church', and Paul, to whom was entrusted the revelation that the Church is Christ's Body, tells us in many different ways that we are to build up the Body. So we have before us a scripture which informs us that it is Christ who builds the Church and a sample of many others which plainly show that the members also build the Church.

This then is the high calling of every member of the Body, and this is the real reason for the gifts, otherwise called Spirituals. They are the chosen means of co-operation with Christ for the unification and consolidation

of the whole Church. It is He who is building the universal Church. He is the overall Head. We in our limited capacity and local settings build up the visible expression of the Church in these places, but only when we do so by these means are we a true church. Building up a local church we are also building the universal Church, for whether it be He or we, it is the same. He is the builder if when we speak we 'speak as the oracles of God', and when we act, 'we do all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

In the Church all must be done with the purpose of building it up a spiritual body unto the full stature of Christ. The Church is His Body in its entirety, from head to feet it is Him. It exists for the presence and manifestation of His Spirit in the world, and the gifts or Spirituals are given to His members that they may be used for:

- 1) demonstrations of His power to man outside of the Church, and
- 2) edification of the Body itself.

The Body is not to be content with more or less representing Him, or generally being in His likeness, it must be in His image, that is, spiritual.

G.W.N.