

THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS : AN EXPANDED PARAPHRASE

IV. PAUL REPLIES TO THE LETTER FROM CORINTH (Ch. 7 : 1-16 : 14)

(Continued)

(e) *The Conduct of Church Meetings* (Ch. 11 : 2 - 14 : 40)

i. *Women in the Church* (Ch. 11 : 2-16)

YOU assure me that you remember me in everything and hold fast to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. For this I heartily commend you.

But I wish you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and that the man is head of the woman, while God Himself is the 'head' of Christ. Any man who engages in public prayer or prophesying with his head veiled does dishonour to his head; but any woman who engages in public prayer or prophesying with her head *unveiled* does dishonour to *her* head : she might as well have her head completely shaved. If she wears no veil on her head, then let her get her hair cropped short. But if it is an unseemly thing for a woman to have her head shaved or cropped short, let her wear a veil.

A man should have his head unveiled, because he is the image and glory of God; but a woman is man's glory. Man (in the first instance) did not come from woman, but woman from man; nor was man created for woman's sake, but woman for man's. A woman therefore should have her head veiled in recognition of authority, and that on account of the angels.¹ But by the Lord's appointment woman is not independent of man any more than man is independent of woman. For just as woman (in the beginning) came from man, so man receives his life through woman; but all alike come from God.

Judge this matter for yourselves : is it a decorous thing for a woman to have her head unveiled when she prays to God? Surely nature itself teaches you that for a man to grow his hair long is a disgrace to him, whereas a woman's long hair is her glory ! And why? Because her hair is given as a natural covering for her head.

¹This probably means that angels are invisibly present at church meetings and can learn lessons in propriety from the orderly behaviour of the children of God.

However, if anyone is minded to argue the point, this is all we have to say: we have no such custom as you are trying to introduce, and neither have the churches of God elsewhere.

ii. *The Lord's Supper* (Ch. 11 : 17-34)

But while I am giving you directions about your behaviour in your gatherings, here is something that I cannot commend you for: when you come together the result of your doing so is bad rather than good. What do I mean by that? First of all, I am told that at your meetings you are divided into cliques, and I am compelled to believe there is some measure of truth in this report. I know very well that divisions among you are inevitable, but God overrules them to make it clear which of your number have His approval.

So, I hear, when you come together it is impossible for you to take the Lord's Supper. The reason is that, as you sit at table, every one takes his own supper first, and some are still hungry while others have eaten and drunk to excess. Have you no homes to eat and drink in? Must you show your contempt for the church of God and expose your poorer brethren and sisters to public embarrassment? What can I say to you? Am I to commend you for this? I trow not.

Let me remind you what the Lord's Supper is. The tradition which I delivered to you was earlier delivered to me, and it stems from the Lord Himself. It is this: on the night in which He was delivered up the Lord Jesus took bread; giving thanks, He broke it and said: "This is my body which is for you; do this as my memorial." Similarly He took the cup when supper was over, and said: "This cup is the new covenant, sealed by my blood; every time that you drink it, do it as my memorial." This means that every time you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the death of the Lord, and continue to do so until He comes. Therefore, if anyone eats the bread or drinks the Lord's cup in an unworthy manner, he will be held guilty in respect of the Lord's body and His blood. We must first examine ourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink from the cup. Otherwise, anyone who eats and drinks is eating and drinking condemnation for himself because he does not appreciate the Body. This is why many of you are so weak and ill, and why several are sleeping their last sleep. If only we sat in judgement on ourselves we should not have to undergo the Lord's judgement. But when we do undergo His judgement He is disciplining us to prevent us from sharing

the world's condemnation. So, my brothers, when you come together to eat, show consideration for one another. Any one who is hungry should eat at home, so that your coming together may not result in judgement.

As for the other matters you have raised in this connection, I will deal with them when I visit you.

iii. *Spiritual Gifts : Their Distribution* (Ch. 12 : 1-31a)

How to test inspired utterances (vv. 1-3)

With regard to spiritual gifts, my brothers, I want you to be quite clear in your minds. When you were pagans, you know, you were under control of dumb idols, carried away by their power. I tell you, therefore, that no one who is speaking under the control of the Spirit of God can say "Jesus is accursed," nor can anyone say "Jesus is Lord" except by the power of the Spirit of God.

Nine gifts of the Spirit (vv. 4-11)

Now there are different varieties of gifts, but one and the same Spirit. There are different varieties of service, but one and the same Lord. There are different varieties of activity, but it is one and the same God who is active in all these activities, no matter in whom they are found. Now, whatever form the manifestation of the Spirit takes, every person who receives it receives it for his own spiritual advantage and that of others. It is by one and the same Spirit that one man is given the gift of wise utterance, another the power of imparting knowledge, another faith, another the gift of healing, another the power to do mighty works, another the gift of prophecy, another the ability to distinguish spiritual manifestations, another various kinds of languages and yet another the power to interpret them. But, I repeat, it is one and the same Spirit who gives effect to all these gifts, as he distributes them to each according to His will.

The body and its parts (vv. 12-26)

The human body, we know, is one, but it has many organs; yet all the organs of the body, numerous as they are, constitute one body. So it is with Christ. All of us — Jews and Greeks, slaves and freemen — were baptized in one Spirit into one body, and we were all made partakers of one Spirit. All of us, I say, in all our variety, for the body consists of many parts, not of one only. If the foot says, "I don't belong to the body because I am not the hand", for all its protestation it is still part of the body. So too the ear is not separated from the body just because it begins to

say, "I don't belong to the body because I am not the eye." If the whole body were one enormous eye, where would the hearing be? If it were all devoted to hearing, where would the smelling be? But as it is, God has arranged the various organs in the body, putting each one as He has thought fit. If it were all one single organ, where would the body be? But as things are there are many organs, and one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you"; neither can the head say to the feet, "I don't need you." In fact, those parts of the body which are reckoned to be weaker turn out to be the more necessary, and those which are reckoned to be less honourable have all the more honour bestowed on them, while those which are less presentable are given a presentable covering, of which our more presentable parts have no need. God, you see, has put the body together in this way, bestowing greater honour on those parts which naturally lack it, so that there should be no cleavage among the parts of the body, but all of them should have the same care one for another. So, if one part suffers pain or harm, each part shares its suffering; if one part is honoured, all the others have a share in its honour.

Exercising spiritual gifts (vv. 27-31a)

Now you are Christ's body, and each one of you is part of that body. God has appointed us to exercise various functions in the Church — apostles first of all, then prophets, thirdly teachers, and after that those who are endowed with the power to perform mighty works, with the gift of healing, with a helpful disposition, with the capacity for government, with utterance in various kinds of tongues. You would not expect everyone to be an apostle, would you? Or everyone to be a prophet? Or a teacher? It is not everyone who is able to perform mighty works, or who possesses the gift of healing, or who can speak with "tongues" or interpret them, is it? No; but let each of you aim at the highest kind of spiritual gifts.

iv. *Spiritual Gifts : The Supremacy of Love* (Ch. 12 : 31 b - 13 : 13)

Now I am going to tell you a way that is better than any other by far.

I may speak every language, angelic as well as human, but if I have no love, I am simply a resounding gong, a noisy tambourine. I may be able to prophesy, I may understand all mysteries and every kind of knowledge, I may even have the fullest degree of faith — faith that moves mountains — but if I have no love, I am nothing at all. Yes, I may even give all my belongings away to

charity, I may go so far as to be burned at the stake, but if I have no love, it does me no good.

Love is patient, love is kind, love knows no jealousy, love is never boastful; love puts on no airs, never acts dishonourably, never places her own interests first, and never loses her temper. Love never imputes evil motives, never feels glad when others go wrong, but rejoices in everything that is right and true. Love conceals the faults of others, always believes the best, never despairs, and remains steadfast to the end. Love never fails, though everything else may fail : prophesying will come to an end, tongues will cease, special gifts of knowledge will one day be no more. At present our knowledge is incomplete, and so is our prophesying; but when we attain perfection, everything that is incomplete will disappear. In my childhood I spoke and thought and reasoned like a child; when I grew up, I finished with the ways of childhood; and so it is with the present age of imperfection as compared with the perfection yet to come. At present we see only the dim reflection of reality, as in a metal mirror; but then we shall see face to face. Now my knowledge is incomplete, but then I shall know as fully as I myself am known. So then there are three things that abide for ever, and these are faith, hope and love; but love is the greatest of the three.

(To be continued)