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*"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"*

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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE MIND	145
THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY	152
NOTES ON HEBREWS	157
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PENTATEUCH	163
OLD WORDS WITH NEW MEANINGS	170
THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS	177
TRANSFORMATION vs. EVOLUTION	184

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# THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS

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(FINAL ARTICLE)

## 4. Principal Topics of the Epistle

The previous Outline Survey is detailed enough for a general grasp of the Epistle as a whole, but there are some sections which demand a closer scrutiny. These are the sections which exceed the limits of a chapter, and which, by reason of the chapter divisions, are likely to lose their force unless they are viewed in their completeness. There are three such sections in this Epistle, viz.—

- |                      |                               |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| I. Chs. 1: 10-4: 21. | Concerning Religious Factions |
| II. Chs. 8-11: 1.    | Concerning Christian Liberty. |
| III. Chs. 12-14.     | Concerning Spiritual Gifts.   |

To these we should add Ch. 15, that of the Resurrection. To master the argument of each of these sections would vastly increase the range of our vision and, if obeyed, would greatly improve our conduct. All I propose to do here is to furnish the reader with an analysis whereby each of these sections may be studied minutely.

The first of these larger topics is:

### I. CONCERNING RELIGIOUS FACTIONS. CHS. 1:10—4:21.

#### 1. The Fact of Divisions. 1:10—17 a.

- (i) Paul's Appeal for unity, v. 10. Unity of spirit that will lead to unity of testimony.
- (ii) The Appeal is warranted, vv. 11, 12. Paul has heard of the contentions among them.
- (iii) The Appeal is defended, vv. 13—17 a. Paul at least was free from any responsibility for the state of affairs.

The Apostle now takes the Corinthians behind the fact, to:

#### 2. The Error of Divisions. 1:17 b—4:5.

This error consists in a two-fold misapprehension.

(A) *Of the True Nature of the Gospel of Christ.* 1:17 b-3:4.

(a) *The Gospel is not Human Wisdom.* 1:17 b-2:5.

This is demonstrated by:

(i) The Central Fact of the Gospel: the Cross. 1:17 b-25.

The Cross is a mystery to the Jews and an absurdity to the Greeks, but therein is displayed the wisdom of God.

(ii) The Composition of the Church at Corinth. 1:26-31.

Five is the number of human weakness; notice here, what has been called "God's five-ranked army of fools". The truth is independent of worldly patronage.

(iii) The Nature and Character of Paul's Preaching. 2:1-5.

The Apostle had not appealed to their carnal intellects, but had come with the plain message of the Gospel. But lest they should imagine that this redemptive revelation was contrary to wisdom, Paul now shows that:

(b) *The Gospel is Divine Wisdom.* 2:6-3:4.

This is demonstrated by:

(i) The Origin and the Obscurity of it. 2:6-9.

It is 'God's Wisdom,' and is 'hidden' from the worldly wise. That they were ignorant of it is shown by how they acted.

(ii) The Revelation and Proclamation of it. 2:10-13.

Only the Divine Spirit knows the "things of God," and He only can make them known. What the Apostles had taught, they had been taught by Him.

(iii) The Attitude of Men towards it. 2:14-3:4

Three classes of men are here brought to view. The *natural* man (2:14). "Dead in trespasses and sins." The *spiritual* man (2:15, 16). "Alive unto God." The *carnal* man (3:1-4).

Regenerated, but under the power of the "flesh".

But there was, on the part of the Corinthians, a misapprehension also.

(B) *Of the Place and Office of the Christian Minister.* 3:5-4:5.

(a) *Christian Ministers in Relation to the Church.* 3:5-15.

(i) Their Functions and Worth. 3:5-9.

It is theirs to plant and to water; only God can give the increase; therefore God is everything, and they are nothing.

(ii) Their Responsibility and Reward. 3:10-15.

The reference here is to the work of those who professed to be Christian ministers. Let such take heed how they built, for a day of testing was coming in which only the imperishable would remain.

(b) *The Church in Relation to Christian Ministers.*  
3:16-4:5.

(i) The Peril and Folly of Glorifying in Men. 3:16-23.

Some were not only not "building up", but were actually "pulling down". Such are gravely warned in verses 16, 17. And how foolish is it to glory in men, for, out of Christ, their wisdom is worthless; and in Christ, all the blessings of the Church are ours.

(ii) The Inadequacy of all human Estimates of Men.  
4:1-5.

Four standards of judgment are brought to view: (1) Our friends' judgment of us; (2) The worlds' judgment of us; (3) Our self-judgment; (4) God's judgment of us. The true judgment shall be revealed when Christ comes again.

Greatest attention should be given to this second section "The Error of Divisions", as therein is to be found the heart of the argument. The two main parts of it (A) 1:17 b-3:4 and (B) 3:5-4:5, should be read over until the mind is quite familiar with the text, and distinguishes clearly between these two misapprehensions. After that, the first of the two should be taken and studied in detail, and then the second. The work is not rightly done until the mind can run through either this or your own analysis without the aid of the Book.

The error of these factions had reference to what they were in themselves. But how did they raise? This leads to a treatment of:

3. The Cause of Divisions. 4:6-21.

(A) *The Contrasted States of the Church and the Apostles.* 4:6-13.

(a) The Pride and ease of the Church. 4:6-8.

They were "puffed up," "filled," "become rich," yet nothing was theirs that they had not received.

(b) The Contempt and Suffering of the Apostles. 4:9-13.

This is a most graphic and illuminating section, in which the Apostles are said to be a theatre unto angels and men.

(B) *The Practical treatment of the Case of Divisions.* 4:14-21.

(a) Paul's Motive in writing to the Church. 4:14-16.

Not to shame his spiritual children, but to admonish them.

(b) Paul's Intention to visit the Church. 4:17-21.

He sends Timothy to them for the present, but he himself is to follow.

## II. CONCERNING CHRISTIAN LIBERTY. CHS. 8—11:1.

First of all—

1. **The Subject is Introduced.** 8:1-3.

That this is just a preliminary word is seen by a comparison of verses 1 and 4. "Now concerning," and "Concerning therefore".

2. **The Subject is Discussed.** 8:4—10:22.

As in the former topic, this central section is the one that claims our careful attention; especially as the line of argument is not at first obvious. Some have thought that Ch. 8 treats of one subject, Ch. 9 of another, and Ch. 10 of yet another. But this is not so, as a reference to Ch. 8:4 and Ch. 10:19-22 will show. This large section begins and ends with the same topic, and it is discussed all the way between. How great this topic is can be understood only as its teaching is apprehended and obeyed. The argument is as follows:—

*First, a Christian's Liberty finds a limit in his relation to others.*

8:4—9:22.

(a) The subject is viewed from the standpoint of *Knowledge and its Rights.* 8:4-6.

Of course the idol in itself is nothing, and the meat offered to it is no different from other meat; we know that; and were knowledge the only consideration, the question need not have arisen.

But there is a greater aspect than that, so now:—

(b) The subject is viewed from the standpoint of *Love and its Obligations*. 8:7—9:22.

This long section is divided into two parts; first of all there is a short expository section, and then that is enforced by personal example.

(i) Paul's *Exposition* of the matter. 8:7—13.

True, they had the right to eat of idol-meats, but in exhausting that right they were neglectful of the law of brother-love, which is a very much greater thing than the law of selfish-right. For the "weak" brother, Christ died, and cannot they, for that same brother, sacrifice a piece of meat?

The proverb "example is better than precept" is not altogether true, but precept without example is not always effectual; nor does the Apostle offer it alone. So now we have

(ii) Paul's *Example* in the matter. 9:1—22.

Here Paul shows, (a) that his apostleship was established beyond question (9:1—3). He too had seen the Lord, and the Corinthians were his fruit in the Lord. (b) As an Apostle he was entitled to maintenance from the Church (9:4—14). This was only right: It was a *Personal* right (vv. 4—6). The other apostles were maintained by those to whom they ministered, why should Paul not be? It was also a *common* right (v. 7). The soldier, the husbandman, the shepherd all live of their calling, why not the minister of the Gospel? Moreover, it was a *divine* right (vv. 8—10). The Old Testament commands that this very thing be done.

Not only was it a right thing, but it was *reasonable*. If for the spiritual interests of the people ministers leave all secular callings, it is only reasonable that they should be maintained by the people to whom they minister (vv. 11, 12). Also it was *ordained* (9:13, 14) by the Lord Himself.

On the other hand, Paul had received nothing from the church in Corinth, and he intended to maintain this attitude (vv. 15—18). So that though it was right, and reasonable, and ordained of God, he had waived his apostolic privileges lest his glorying be made void. In doing so he discloses further that he sacrificed himself that he might gain others (v. 19): For Jews,

proselytes, Gentiles and weak saints (vv. 20—22 a); which was an example of the principle of adaptation without compromise (v. 22 b).

All this time he has been showing the limits of a Christian's liberty *in view of others*: Now he turns to the other half of the subject: A Christian's liberty finds a limit *in his relation to himself* (9:23—10:22).

The basal idea of this section is that, *voluntary renunciation* is essential to progressive salvation; and that truth he illustrates by several examples.

(a) The Case of the *Apostle*. 9:23—27.

He employs as figures two of the Corinthian sports, Racing and Boxing, and teaches that in order to success in either of these, voluntary renunciation was necessary; and such renunciation he had made.

(b) The Case of the *Israelites*. 10:1—13.

They all were sharers in the common privilege instituted under Moses, and yet, thousands upon thousands of them perished, because in place of self-sacrifice, they yielded to every form of self-indulgence: and the consequences to themselves of such a course, must be a perpetual warning to us. The Apostle having cited his own case, and that of the Israelites, now turns to

(c) The Case of the *Corinthians*. 10:14—22.

The argument is here brought to a climax, and is most searching Paul declares that, behind the bread and wine of the Communion, is the Lord; and, behind the sacrifices of old, was the altar, and all that it signified. So likewise, behind the meats offered to idols at Corinth, and behind the idols themselves, were demons. Christians could not drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of demons. In the remaining section:—

*The Subject is Concluded.* (10:23—11:1).

And the conclusion of the whole matter is, that, side by side with our rights, we must consider always our neighbours good, and the edification of the Christian Brotherhood. In this, Paul followed Christ, and he exhorted them to follow him.



The *third* great topic in this Epistle is:—

### III. CONCERNING SPIRITUAL GIFTS. CHS. 12—14.

As the relation of these chapters to one another is quite obvious, there is no need here to enter into minute details of analysis, but I submit the following outline:—

#### 1. *The Bestowal of the Gifts.* Ch. 12.

The Gifts are of great diversity, but they are all given with a view to spiritual profit. The nine chief gifts are enumerated, and it is emphatic that they are all ministered by the Holy Spirit according to His sovereign will.

The many members constitute *one Body* (vv. 12, 13); and the one Body manifests *many* members (vv. 14–26). There is a fundamental necessity for this, in order to the proper employment and perfection of the Body. The members of inferior gifts are as truly of the Body as those of superior gifts; and the arrangement of the members in the Body is the work of God Himself, who places them for the mutual care of one another.

Moreover, the gifts in the Church are *divinely determined* (vv. 27, 28); and *mutually dependent* (vv. 29–31). It is not left with us to choose which gifts we shall have; and whatever is given to one does not allow him to dispense with those gifted with other gifts. The “helps” cannot deny the “prophets”!

#### 2. *The Guardian of the Gifts.* Ch. 13. LOVE.

i. The preeminence of Love, vv. 1–3.

ii. The prerogatives of Love, vv. 4–7.

iii. The permanence of Love, vv. 8–13.

#### 3. *The Exercise of the Gifts.* Ch. 14:1–40.

(i) The Comparative *utility* of “Tongues and Prophecy”. vv. 1–25.

(a) To those within the Church. vv. 1–19.

After showing that the gift of tongues is inferior to that of Prophecy (1–5), the Apostle argues that tongues uninterpreted are useless to the Church. If pipe and harp give distinctness of sound, so that it may be known what is piped and what is harped, surely those who speak things divine should make themselves understood; else what is the use of speaking at all, one might just as well speak a foreign tongue in his own land? Furthermore, tongues uninterpreted are an impropriety against the Church.

(b) To those without the Church. vv. 20–25.

St Paul proceeds to show that tongues are not a sign to believers, nor yet to unbelievers of the blessed state of believers, but of their own perilous state. They are “a demonstration given to their own conscience of the state of unbelief which God sees them to have reached”. Prophesying on the other hand, reveals the secrets of the heart, convicts the conscience, and so brings the soul to the feet of God.

(ii) The *orderly* use of “Tongues and Prophecy”. vv. 26–33 a.

(a) The General Principle. v. 26. Edification should be the end of all Ministry.

(b) The Practical Operation. vv. 27–33 a. Certain common-sense regulations are set down for the orderly conduct of the public meetings.

(iii) Sundry final *exhortations*. vv. 33 b–40.

It would be quite impossible to over-estimate the value of these three great sections of the Epistle to Corinth, and equally impossible to gauge the result in blessing that would come to the soul that understood and obeyed them.

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## TRANSFORMATION

*Versus*

## EVOLUTION

Topical

The Darwinian Evolutionists are still busy searching for the “Missing Link”. They are equally diligent in ignoring the BIBLE solution to their problem. The output of literature on the subject continues with an undiminished repetition of unproven (and unprovable) theorisings. It is just wonderful how great minds can “clutch at a claw-bone” found in any remote part of the globe—and make it “speak”! One would look for a more guarded approach in these days of discriminating enlightenment. But apparently we must not expect it. “At the beginning of the present