

THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS : AN EXPANDED PARAPHRASE

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

(e) *The Conduct of Church Meetings* (Ch. 11:2-14:40), *continued* v. *Spiritual Gifts: Glossolalia and Prophecy* (Ch. 14:1-40) *The Superiority of Prophecy* (vv. 1-12)

MAKE love your chief aim. As for spiritual gifts, cultivate them diligently, but especially the gift of prophecy. If a man speaks in a "tongue," it is to God that he speaks, not to his fellow-men. No one understands what he says; the things that he utters by inspiration are mysteries. But when a man prophesies, what he says brings spiritual profit to the others and ministers encouragement and comfort to them. When a man speaks in a "tongue", what he says brings spiritual profit to himself alone; when he prophesies, the whole church reaps the benefit. O yes, I should like you all to speak with "tongues", but I should much prefer you all to have the gift of prophecy. The man who prophesies is preferable to him who speaks with "tongues", unless the "tongues" are interpreted for the benefit of the church. Now, my brothers, just consider: if I come to you and speak with "tongues", what good shall I do you, if I give you no clear message by way of revelation or knowledge or prophecy or instruction? It is the same with lifeless musical instruments, like a flute or a lyre—if they give no distinct note, how can one tell what is being sounded on the flute or lyre? And in truth, if an indistinct note is sounded on the trumpet, who will make the right preparation for fighting? In the same way, if your tongue does not pronounce intelligible words, how can anyone know what is being said? You will simply be speaking to empty air. No matter how many kinds of sounds there are in the world (for there is nothing that makes no sound at all), if I don't know the meaning of the sound, I shall be a foreigner to the man who is speaking and he will be a foreigner to me. So in your case, since you are so eager to cultivate spiritual gifts, make it your aim to abound in those that will promote the well-being of the church.

Tongues must be interpreted (vv. 13-19)

The man who speaks with a "tongue", therefore, must pray for the ability to interpret it. If I pray in a strange tongue, my spirit engages in prayer, but my intelligence reaps no advantage from it. What is the proper course, then? I will pray with my spirit indeed, but with my intelligence as well; I will sing praises with my spirit, but with my intelligence as well. If you bless God in a strange tongue, how can someone who feels himself an outsider say "Amen" at the conclusion of your thanksgiving? He doesn't know what you are speaking about. There is nothing wrong with your thanksgiving, but it doesn't help the other man. Thank God, I can speak with tongues better than any of you, but in the church I had sooner utter five words with my native intelligence, so as to convey some instruction to others, than ten thousand words in a strange tongue.

The outsider must be considered (vv. 20-25)

My brothers, don't remain content with the intelligence of little children. Be as innocent as infants, indeed, so far as wickedness is concerned; but be fullgrown men in your intelligence. There is an Old Testament text which says :

By men of different tongues, by the lips of foreigners, will I speak to this nation,

And not even so will they listen to me, says the Lord.¹

So then, these "tongues" are a sign given by God to unbelievers, to those who refuse to listen to Him, and not to believers. Prophecy, on the other hand, is for believers, not for unbelievers. If the whole church meets together and everyone speaks with tongues, and outsiders or non-Christians come in, won't they say that you are mad? But if everyone is prophesying, and a non-Christian or an outsider comes in, he feels himself convicted by all, exposed to the scrutiny of all, as the secrets of his mind are brought into the open; he will fall down on his face and worship God, declaring that God is truly in you all.

Order, not disorder (vv. 26-33a)

Well, my brothers, what does all this lead up to? When you come together, everyone has some contribution he wants to make: one man has a psalm, everyone has some contribution he wants to pass on, another has a revelation, another an utterance in a "tongue", and yet another an interpretation of such an utterance. See to it that everything is done in such a way as to benefit the church. That is to say, if there is to be speaking with tongues,

¹ Isa. 28: 11, 12b.

let it be done by two, or at the most by three, each in his turn, and then let one person give an interpretation. If no interpreter be present, then the man who has the gift of tongues must keep quiet in church, speaking only to himself and to God. As for the prophets, let two or three of them speak, while the rest exercise their gift of discernment.² If a revelation is granted to someone else as he sits listening, he should not give utterance to it until the first stops speaking. For all of you may prophesy one by one, so that all may receive instruction and encouragement. The prophets' inspiration is under the prophets' control, for God is a God of peace, not of disorder.

A Word for Women (vv. 33b-36)

As in all the churches of God's holy people, women should be quiet in your church meetings. They are not permitted to speak; it is for them to be submissive, as the law says. If they wish to learn anything, they should ask their husbands at home; it is unseemly for a woman to speak in church. Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Was it to you only that it came?

Conclusion (vv. 37-40)

If any of you is reckoned to be a prophet or a man of spiritual discernment, let him recognize that what I am writing to you is the Lord's commandment. But if anyone disregards the Lord's commandment, why should anyone regard *him*? To sum up, then, my brothers, covet the gift of prophecy, and don't forbid people to speak with tongues; but see to it that everything is done in a seemly and orderly manner.

(f) The Resurrection (Ch. 15:1-58)

i. The Apostolic Gospel (vv. 1-11)

Now, my brothers, I want to remind you of the good news which I made known to you, the good news which you in your turn received, in the strength of which you stand, and through which comes your salvation — if you bear in mind the terms in which I made it known to you (unless you believed it without due consideration). Well, then, I delivered to you as of first importance what what I myself had received — namely, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the prophetic scriptures, that He was buried, and that He was raised from the dead on the third day, also in accordance with the same scriptures;

² Cf. 1 Cor. 12: 10, where "the ability to distinguish spiritual manifestations" is included among the gifts of the Spirit.

that He appeared to Peter, then to the Twelve, and after that He appeared to over 500 brothers in the faith on a single occasion. (Of these the majority have survived to the present day, although some have fallen asleep in death.) Then, too, He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also, thus bringing me to life long after the proper time. Yes, I am the least and last of the apostles; in fact, I am not worthy of the name of apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. It is by God's grace that I am what I am, and that grace of His which was shown me did not prove fruitless. No, late-comer to the ranks of the apostles though I was, I have toiled and accomplished more than all of them. Do I say that *I* have done it? No, not I, but God's grace which was with me. So then, whether it be I or those other apostles, this is the message we proclaim, this is the message which you have believed.

ii. *No Resurrection, no Gospel* (vv. 12-19)

If, then, the gospel proclaims Christ as one who has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ Himself has not been raised; but if Christ has not been raised, our message is an empty fantasy, and so is your faith. We apostles are convicted of bearing false witness against God, because we have borne witness concerning Him that He raised up Christ, when in fact He did not raise Him — that is to say, if it is true that the dead are not raised. I repeat: if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is all to no avail; you are still held fast in your sins. Then too those who have fallen asleep, the dead in Christ, have perished for ever. If it is only in this life that we have our hope set on Christ, we are the most pitiable of all men.

iii. *Firstfruits and Harvest* (vv. 20-28)

But in fact Christ *has* been raised from the dead, as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Since it was through a man that death entered the world, so it is through a man that the resurrection of the dead is brought in. As all die by virtue of their solidarity with Adam, so all will be brought back to life by virtue of their solidarity with Christ. But each must be raised in his proper order: first Christ Himself as the firstfruits, next the people of Christ at His advent, and then comes the consummation, when He hands over the kingdom to our God and Father, after bringing to naught every principality, every power and force (that

is opposed to God). For, as the scripture says, God "has put all things under His feet".³ But when it says "all things", it obviously excludes the One who put all things under Him. When, then, all things have been brought under His authority, then the Son Himself will declare His submission to the One who put all things under Him, so that God may be all in all.

iv. *Practical Arguments* (vv. 29-34)

Again, if there is no resurrection, what purpose is achieved by those who are baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised up at all, why on earth do people receive baptism on their behalf? Further, why do we expose ourselves to danger hour by hour? I tell you, brothers, as surely as I exult over you in Christ Jesus our Lord, I face death every day. If, to use a current expression, I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what good does that do me? If dead people are not raised up, then "let us eat and drink today, for we have to die tomorrow."⁴ Make no mistake: "bad company corrupts good morals."⁵ So wake right up and sin no more. Some people simply show their ignorance of God: I say this to make you feel ashamed.

v. *The Manner of the Resurrection* (vv. 35-49)

But someone will object, "How are the dead raised up? What kind of body do they return with?" You senseless man, when you sow something in the ground, it does not spring to new life unless it dies. And when you sow it, it is not the "body" that is to emerge that you sow, but the bare grain — whether of wheat or anything else. But God gives it a "body" in accordance with His will; each kind of seed has a special "body" allotted to it. Again, if we think of the animal kingdom, flesh is not all the same flesh; human beings have one kind of flesh, beasts have another kind, birds have another and fish yet another. Moreover, there are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, and the glory of heavenly bodies is of one order, and the glory of earthly bodies of another. And within the order of heavenly bodies, the sun has its own glory, the moon's glory is different, and the glory of the stars different from either; while among the stars one star has a different glory from another.

The resurrection of the dead follows these analogies. The sowing is marked by corruption, the rising by incorruption; the sowing by humiliation, the rising by glory; the sowing by weak-

³ Ps. 8: 6 (similarly interpreted of Christ in Eph. 1: 22; Heb. 2: 8).

⁴ Isa. 22: 13.

⁵ Quoted from Menander, *Thais*.

ness, the rising by power. What is sown is a body energized by the soul; what is raised is a body energized by the spirit. If there is a body energized by the soul, there is also a body energized by the spirit. So the scripture says, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul"⁶; but the last Adam a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual body that comes first but that which is energized by the soul; after that comes the spiritual body. The first man was made "from the dust of the earth";⁷ the second man is of heavenly origin. Like the first man of earth, so are all the men of earth; but all the heavenly men are like the Heavenly Man. As we have worn the image of the man of earth, we are in turn to wear the image of the Heavenly Man.

vi. *A New Revelation* (vv. 50-58)

What I mean is this, my brothers: our present bodies of flesh and blood cannot inherit God's eternal kingdom, for what is liable to corruption cannot inherit an incorruptible order. Here is a new revelation which I have to convey to you: we shall not all sleep the sleep of death, but we are all to be changed in a split second, in the flicker of an eyelid, when the last trumpet sounds. For the trumpet is going to sound, and then the dead will be raised in incorruptible bodies, and all of us—dead or alive—shall be changed. Yes, this corruptible body must put on incorruption; this mortal body must put on immortality. And when that happens — when this corruptible body, as I say, puts on incorruption, and this mortal body puts on immortality — then the words of scripture will be fulfilled: "Death has been swalled up in victory."⁸

Where is your victory, death?

Where is your sting, death?⁹

It is sin that imparts its sting to death; it is the law that gives such power to sin. But God be thanked, for He gives us victory (over sin and death alike) through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So, my dear brothers, be firmly rooted and unshaken in your faith, and see to it that you are ever and increasingly active in the Lord's service, since you know that your labours in His cause are not fruitless.

(g) *The Collection for Jerusalem* (Ch. 16:1-14)

You have asked about the collection which is being made for the people of God in Jerusalem. You should carry out the same directions as I have given to the churches of Galatia. That is to say, on the first day of each week every one of you should

⁶ Gen. 2: 7b. ⁷ Gen. 2: 7a.

⁸ Isa. 25: 8. ⁹ Hos. 13: 14.

set aside a certain amount, in proportion to his weekly income, and save it up so that there will be no need to organize special collections when I come. You should appoint as messengers whomsoever you think fit, and then, when I arrive, I will give them letters of introduction to Jerusalem and send them there as bearers of your gift. If it seems proper for me to go as well, they will have my company on their journey.

I will come to you when I have gone through Macedonia. I intend to go through Macedonia, you see, and then I may perhaps stay with you or even spend the winter with you, so that you can speed me on my further way. I have changed my mind about paying you a visit just now (which was my former intention); instead, I hope to stay with you for some time later on, God willing. For the present, I am going to stay in Ephesus till Pentecost: a great and fruitful opportunity has opened up for me here, accompanied by opposition on the part of many. When Timothy comes to you, see that his apprehensions are set at rest while he is with you. He is as devoted to the Lord's work as I am myself; don't let anyone treat him as if he didn't matter. Speed him on his way back to me with right good will; I am expecting him back along with the brothers with whom he set out on his journey from here. And as regards our brother Apollos, I urged him repeatedly to travel with those brothers and pay you a visit; however, it was plainly not God's will that he should visit you just now, but he will do so when he has a favourable opportunity. For yourselves, be vigilant, stand firm in your faith, behave like men and grow in strength. Let all that you do be done in love.

(h) *Recognition of Leaders* (Ch. 16:15-18)

Now, my brothers, please pay heed to this. You know the family of Stephanas; they were my first converts in the province of Achaia and they have devoted themselves to serving the people of God. You should submit yourselves to people like that, and to all others who share their labour and service. I am very glad to have had a visit from Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus; they have done for me on your behalf everything that absence prevented you from doing: they have brought refreshment to my spirit — and so to yours as well. You ought to give proper recognition to men like them.

V. FINAL GREETINGS (Ch. 16:19-24)

The churches of Asia send you their greetings. Aquila and Prisca send you their heartiest Christian greetings, together with

the church that meets in their house. All the brothers who are with me send you their greetings. Please greet one another with a holy kiss. And here is my own greeting to you, written with my own hand, as I sign my name — PAUL.

If anyone does not love our Lord, let him be under the ban. *Marana-tha*.¹⁰ May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to you all in Christ Jesus.

¹⁰ An Aramaic watchword of the early Christians, meaning "Come, O our Lord"; it was used in particular at the conclusion of the Lord's Supper (cf. 1 Cor. 11: 26).