

Clapton Hall Addresses.

No. 6.

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LECTURE

ON

Worship and Ministry.

BY

*F. C. BLAND.*

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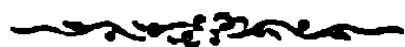
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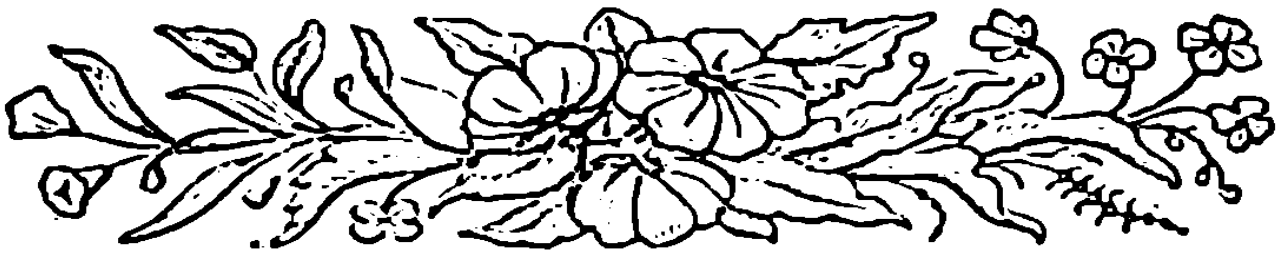
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ON  
WORSHIP AND MINISTRY.

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Read I CORINTHIANS xii.

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THE subject we are going to consider to-night is chiefly that of ministry; the exercise in their varied functions of the members of the body of Christ.

The Spirit of God, when about to instruct us on this subject, takes the human body as a symbol of the

mystic body of Christ, and by reminding us of the various uses of the one, seeks to make plain to us the functions of the other.

When God created man, He made him a perfect being, and he would be an impious man indeed who would pretend that he could improve on the construction of the natural body ; and it is not too much to say that it would be the height of impiety for us to pretend that we could improve on the divine mechanism of the body of Christ, or to say that God had not given us ample guidance for the exercise of its various members, or to assume that the whole order might be improved by man's arrangements.

It is not intended by God that the great truths and principles taught in these chapters should be learned by rote, and then acted out mechanically ; for when the same apostle who wrote this epistle to the Corinthians comes to write to the Ephesians of the administration (*οικονομία* R.V.) of the mystery, he bows his knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He would grant them according to the riches of His glory, that they might be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man (not that this knowledge might be merely apprehended in our heads), but that Christ might dwell in *our hearts* by faith, that being rooted

and grounded in love, we might be able with all saints to comprehend what is the breadth and length and depth and height—of what? I answer at once, *of the mystery*, and to know, in connection with it, the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that we might be filled into all the fulness of God. Then, in chapter iv. of the same epistle, he assumes that they are going to attempt some great thing, and therefore, as preparatory to it, he exhorts them to be girt about with the moral requirements that follow; viz., lowliness and meekness and forbearance one with another in love.

Without these qualities the object cannot be attained, and angels will

only see a display of man's folly and confusion instead of the manifold wisdom of God. God never meant His children to be independent of Him, whether as individuals or as assemblies ; and if faith in God breaks down, we are the most helpless of all, and liable to the greatest failure and confusion, because we have professedly given up all human arrangements, and profess to walk by faith, and not by sight.

The divine principles of 1 Cor. xii. and xiv., be they carried out ever so rigidly, become as much a system as any other human system, with perhaps a few more scriptural ideas, if they are not carried out in dependence upon God, and if they

do not manifest His power in their administration ; for the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.

Now in chapter xii. we are taught the divine mechanism of the *body* of Christ ; and in chapter xiv. we get the members in exercise in the *assembly*, the thirteenth chapter coming in between, giving us the moral principle which must pervade the whole ; or, to use a simile from mechanics, the oil which lubricates the machine, that all may work with harmony and smoothness.

The position we have taken outside all systems is a solemn one, because it challenges a comparison between what we have left and that to which we have come out. It



ought to bear that comparison ; but it will only do so when these divine principles given us in Corinthians and Ephesians are carried out in complete dependence on God and in subjection one to another.

Now in considering these chapters—I Cor. xii.—xiv.—we must notice that we get in chapter xii. what is true of the *body* as a vital organization, in which every member, young or old, male or female, has its own part to perform ; while in chapter xiv. we get the same organization spoken of as the *Church* or *assembly*.

In the body everything remains as true to-day as when Paul uttered these words we have been dwelling on from chapter xii. 12–27. As

members of the body all have ministries to carry out, which are distinct from the ministrations in the assembly as treated of in chapter xiv.

For instance, as members of the body, men and women alike have equal responsibilities, and should be moved by the same feelings of sympathy one towards another—hopes, fears, joys, sorrows, and loving care for each other's welfare, both temporal and spiritual, and that at all times ; and the *apparently* helpless and most afflicted members are often the most helpful and necessary in this respect.

The prayers of ~~saints~~ who have perhaps been laid aside for years on beds of sickness and suffering have

often had more powerful influence for good on those around them than all the preaching they may have listened to. And in the ministration of this care one for another there is no limitation ; and it ought to be in exercise not only on every day in the week, but every hour of each day.

But when we come to speak of the assembly we enter on another aspect of the subject ; and we must not confound *ministries*, which all have, with *gift*, which only some have ; God is as jealous over His own order in the assembly now as He was over the order of His house in past dispensations, where all was divinely arranged, from the carrying of the vessels of the tabernacle to

the entering in of the high priest into the holiest of all. And the slightest departure from God's order met with immediate judgment, as we find in the cases of Nadab and Abihu in connection with worship, Corah, Dathan, and Abiram for intruding into the Priesthood, Uzza in connection with the ark, and Uzziah, who became a leper for intruding into the temple.

But unfaithfulness to God having come in, we find that changes have taken place in connection with the assembly, not in the principles by which the ministrations of the gifts are regulated, but in character of the gifts themselves, while nothing has been altered in the body.

At the first the assembly was accredited by God with miraculous gifts, such as tongues, gifts of healing, miracles, &c. But these gifts have ceased, because men were unfitted to be entrusted with them. (1 Cor. xiii.) But all the gifts needed for the edifying of the body in love (Eph. iv. 13) remain, until we all come into the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect Man, &c.

Now, turning to chapter xiv., we get instructions as to how these gifts were to be exercised when gathered into one place, and here we find restrictions put upon their exercise.

We may say then that chapter xii.

gives us our charter of rights ; while chapter xiv. might be called our statute of limitations. And I would draw your attention to four distinct contrasts between the body as spoken of in chapter xii. 12-27, and the assembly as referred to in chapter xiv.

1. In the body *all* have ministries to fulfil. In the assembly only those whom God has gifted.

2. In the body there are no limitations. In the assembly, as we shall see in considering this chapter, there are divine limitations.

3. In the body all remains unchanged. In the assembly, as in the matter of miraculous gifts, great changes have taken place.

4. In the body women have an honoured place. But in the assembly God's order is, that they should be silent and subject.

But before proceeding, perhaps I ought to refer to the difference between meetings for worship, and those for teaching or exhortation.

In the first all are expected to come together with reverent hearts to meet the Lord Himself; and as worship does not *necessarily* imply the exercise of gift, or even of ministry, those who are not gifted as teachers may take part in prayer or thanksgiving, in giving out a hymn of praise, or in reading a portion of scripture, all of which should be in accordance with the object

for which we are gathered together. But this liberty in the Spirit in worship must not by any means be understood to transform, for the occasion, into teachers those whom God has not gifted as such, or to put men and things out of their places in the order of God's house. But when it is a question of teaching, which is a distinct gift from God, the meeting cannot from its very nature be open to all ; for to make it so would be to deny that the Lord gives gifts to some of the members, but not to all the Body. Now in turning to chapter xiv., I notice that the word "edify" runs through the whole chapter, and governs every action ; and here we get, not



a number of *precepts*, but great principles, for our guidance.

We do not expect to find a text for everything we do, for that would be to subject a spiritual dispensation to commandments and ordinances, and would make us, to a great extent, independent of faith in God; but we do expect to get principles to guide us, and we are given them in chapter xiv.

It has been said, that as these gifts were miraculous ones, that the instructions here given can only apply to them; but the expression used is not "concerning miraculous gifts," but "spiritual," and as *all* gifts are gifts of the Spirit, they come under the direction of this

chapter; and, indeed, common sense will show how suitable are the instructions given here for the guidance and exercise, as well as for the limitations, of gifts of every kind.

The first thought seems to be, that whatever is ministered should be intelligible to those assembled, and that the church or assembly should be edified.

An unknown tongue was a *gift from God*, but it did not therefore follow that its exercise at all times was profitable; and so, taking it as a principle that edification is the object of the exercise of every gift, we gather that it does not always follow that every gift is suitable to every assem-

bly, or, in the words of the chapter, to edification.

Now this has a very wide bearing as a principle; and a most gifted brother and accurate scholar may get his ministry so penetrated by his critical studies as to be a barbarian to an assembly of uneducated people; while, on the other hand, an un-instructed brother, who might have a most blessed gift in gospel testimony, might be unfitted to lead an assembly in worship, or to teach the saints.

Hence the need of the limitations of verses 29–32, where the expression comes in, “Let the other judge,” and, “The spirit of the prophets are subject to the prophets.”

And I may add at once, that everyone taking this chapter as their warrant for ministry must take it in its entirety, and not assume the place of being a spiritual gift while refusing the subjection one to another insisted on in the verses above named.

The ruling principle of ministry is, that it is to be to edification. Then, when we come to details, we learn from verses 7-14 that there should be a *definiteness* in all ministry, that there must be point and meaning in what we say. Even as things without life giving sound, whether pipes, harps, or trumpets, must give a distinctive sound, or there will be confusion.

Then our prayers and songs of

praise, as well as our ministry, should be in the spirit as well as in the understanding, or else the listeners cannot say Amen to what they have heard. Then what follows in verse 17 shows, that while a man may be in communion with God, and, as far as he is *personally* concerned, he gives thanks well, yet his audience is not edified ; so it is plain that we are not to be guided by a spirit of impulse only, but by a spirit of judgment as well.

Thus what might be suitable to the family assembled at home, with its family interests and surroundings, might be, and probably would be, quite unsuitable to the church when assembled for worship or ministry.

Next comes a most important instruction, and that is, if I may use the expression, *for a man to stop when he is done*. To speak five words, while the understanding keeps pace with the tongue, and not to go on to the ten thousand words, which for all the edification they give might as well be in an unknown tongue!

It is by no means a light attainment to have the courage to speak a few words and then sit down.

With all speakers, and especially with young Christians, the fear that those assembled may think that they have nothing to say is a great snare to them ; and when the power has ceased they go on trying to

recover it, seeking for some striking remark to end with, or some rounded period to let themselves down easily by.

When the iron is blunt (Eccles. x. 10), if he whet not the edge, he has to put forth more strength ; and so it happens that when there is no power, that a long and wordy address is given to make up the lack of it.

In verse 27 there is a safeguard against too much ministry. Two, or at most three, speakers are enough, and that by course, or in order. And it is often forgotten that there may be those present who are weak in bodily health, and who get so weary from the lengthened ministry

that they cannot attend to the most spiritual address when it goes beyond a reasonable length.

We are further assured that when ministry is in the power of the Spirit, it will be felt by all who may be present, whether believers or unbelievers, and that they will on coming in confess of a truth that God is amongst us.

Varied as the gifts may be, they will, when exercised in the power of the Spirit, have a collective result in the blessing of those assembled, and in the convincing of unbelievers that God is present, as in the vision in Ezekiel i., there were various agencies—faces, wheels, wings, and eyes, but the result of their collective action



was, like the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech ; for the spirit of the living creatures were in the wheels, the agencies were various, while all worked in harmony, and the result was as if it were the act of one.

Each wheel, the earthly part, had its corresponding wing or heavenly part, and both acted together ; when those stood, these stood ; when these were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them ; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels, and when they stood they let down their wings. There was rest, sudden, absolute, perfect. The spiritual and earthly action ceased together.

The wheels did not roll on after the wings were folded. They had done their work, and there was rest.

Would that it were so in our meetings, and that our silences were produced by a sense of the power of the Spirit, and the felt presence of the Lord, and not times of restlessness and trepidation, not knowing what might come next.

When Ezekiel saw it he fell on his face from a sense, not only of the power, but of the presence in which he was ; for he looks up and sees a man upon the throne above him. This accounts for the order and uniformity in action of the cherubim ; but verily a greater than the cherubim is here. We have our

earthly part and our heavenly part. These human bodies indwelt by the Spirit of God. And we have in our midst the man on the throne; for chapter xii. 5 tells us that there are different administrations, but the same Lord.

I need not refer again at any length to the subjection one to another insisted on in verses 29 and 32, except to say that verse 32 has another application than merely our subjection one to another, and that is that each one's own spirit is to be subject to the spiritual intelligence bestowed on each one who ministers, so that we should act not merely as from a spirit of impulse, but in' a spirit of judgment as well.

Women are *definitely* commanded to keep silence in the assembly, and there is no getting over such a prohibition ; but to subject women to silence on every occasion, for instance, at a reading meeting in a private house, would be to enforce this prohibition beyond what it is intended for.

It is not improper for women to speak on any other subject in private life. The occurrences of every-day life, whether public or private, are legitimate subjects of converse. And is the opening of the Bible to be the only occasion on which their mouths are to be closed ? I trow not.

Now, although women have no

place in *public* ministry in the assembly, they have a most blessed place in prayer *for* the worship and ministry which they attend ; and I doubt not that those who have at heart the glory of God in the meetings of His people, and who wait on Him about it in private prayer and supplication, will in no wise lose their reward. Here is indeed a place where the feeble members may be a necessity, and they may do more to sustain a meeting in spiritual power than those who themselves minister the Word. This is being helps in reality ; and I would solemnly ask those who sit by and listen whether they have ever in their lives sought God in

prayer about the ministry and worship in the assembly where they meet?

Lastly, there is one very important command which as a principle has the widest application, and that is, that *all things* be done decently and in order. Now this refers to everything we do in the assembly. Decency requires that our rooms for meeting in should be clean and reasonably comfortable. We cover the table with a cloth, which should be clean; and we cover the cup which contains the wine with a napkin, not from any ritualistic tendencies, but to keep out dust and wasps—and flies.

Then, as to order, we should meet

punctually. Nothing is more unseemly or more disturbing to worship than to see Christians coming in after a meeting has begun. No one would think of being late if they were invited to dine with a friend ; but irregularity does not seem to be of any account when our Lord is the Host. It is most serious for anyone to be late in coming to the table, but it is more culpable still in those who take part in ministry or worship ; for the one who does so is liable to read a portion of Scripture which may have been read before, or to give out a hymn which has already been sung. Solemnity of demeanour and attitude comes also under the head of decency and

order, and reverent and heartfelt singing in proper tune and time must not be thought lightly of. Having left systems, we are apt to think that we should become unsystematic in everything, and that there is no order in the house of God; but this chapter teaches that we have no such custom.

May He who is still Lord over His own house revive us in the truths of worship and ministry, keeping us ever in subjection, first, to Himself, and then to one another in the fear of God.

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