1 Corinthians 12:11–14

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

> *But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many.*

As He Will — The Spirit's Sovereign Distribution

Verse 11 closes the list of gifts with a statement that governs everything: *dividing to every man severally as he will.* Or, as Darby renders it, as it pleases Him. The distribution of gifts is not a matter of what the individual would like to be or would like to do — it is as He will. That three-word phrase is of very great importance, and we need to be in tune with it, understanding what the Spirit has given us to do.

Gift is given — it is not produced by study. Without disparaging study in any way, it is not study that gives the gift. The gift is there, and there is such a thing as a gift being enlarged in capacity by use, application, and diligence in divine things. It is not limited from the outset; there can be growth in it. Several persons may have the same gift, but not in the same strength or capacity — more in one, somewhat less in another.

The Parable of the Talents — Responsibility, Not Gift

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 is sometimes taken as a picture of gifts. But the one in the parable who buries his talent in the earth is a difficult figure to reconcile with the possession of a Spirit-given gift. The parable speaks more of responsibility than of gift — spheres of responsibility in connection with the kingdom, given according to ability. Following right on the parable of the ten virgins, which is a similitude of the kingdom, the subject here is service and conscience: the awareness that an accounting will be rendered when the Lord returns. That those who have greater responsibility will have commensurate enablement from the Spirit seems a natural implication.

Human Authorisation — A Usurpation

Some of these gifts, in most of Christendom, must be licensed before they can be used publicly. They must be authorised by human agency. But if God has given a gift, the authorisation is already there — and any other authorisation imposed over it is pretence. William Kelly complained that 1 Corinthians 14:40 — *let all things be done decently and in order* — gets cited for every kind of order except the one that is actually in the passage. That is exactly so. It is an order many resist. And those who wish to maintain the system of human authorisation have worked hard to remove the ground for it — writing dissertations to argue that *when that which is perfect is come* in chapter 13 means the closing of the canon of the New Testament, so that the order of chapter 14 no longer applies.

It is interesting that many such preachers preach clearly against the Roman Catholic system, where a priest interposes himself between the believer and Christ, usurping the Lord's place of intercession. And yet they themselves, as clergy, effectively displace the Holy Spirit in the assembly. They can see plainly how wrong it is to usurp the Lord's place. But they do not see how they are occupying the place that belongs to the Holy Spirit in the functioning of the body.

The Pastor and the Members' Responsibility

A fairly fundamental radio preacher was heard describing his pastoral work — watching over various members of his congregation, seeing them go on for a time and then lose ground, and then finding them years later having drifted. He spoke of it as his pastoral burden, and said other pastors would know what he meant.

And yet, further down in our passage, we read that the members should have the same care one for another. That responsibility belongs to every member. The pastoral system, in placing it all with one man, takes away from the Lord's people one of their most vital privileges and responsibilities. And the natural consequence is that the members do not exercise it. They have, in effect, hired a professional to do it for them. That is not being a member of the body, practically speaking.

Darby once wrote to certain clergymen at Geneva, as the Lord was doing a work there: *If you would give up your pastorship, I would recognise your gift as a pastor*. Many of those men were incapable of understanding that statement — their pastorship was their ecclesiastical office, and they could not distinguish it from the gift. Darby was making a clear distinction: the gift is one thing; the office imposed by human system is another. Give up the system, and the gift can function freely. They were too imbued with the system to see it.

The Body — One and Many

Verse 12 introduces the great illustration: the human body. It is one, and it has many members — and all those members, being many, constitute one body. A body in good health has all its members functioning together in harmony.

It is hardly necessary to be reminded that assemblies are not the members of the body. The body is not composed of assemblies. The members are individual persons. There are many of them, but there is one body.

Independency of assemblies imposes a severe constraint on the interpretation of this. If independence is the governing principle, then what is spoken of here must be the local assembly — and one ends up with the teaching that each assembly is a body, meaning there are many bodies. That conclusion has been drawn, not only by Open Brethren but by Baptists and others who hold to independency. Their system forces them to it. When texts bear strongly against them they must find a way around, and in doing so they show how poor the system is when it requires such handling of Scripture.

Coming down to verse 28, the same chapter says God has set certain in *the* church — first apostles. If that church is a local church, one is stuck with the same difficulty that arises in Ephesians 4 — that apostles were gifts given to some local church where they happened to be found. That is manifestly not the case. Gifts are in the body. The body is anywhere and everywhere on earth. When a person goes from one place to another, the gift he has is carried with him. That is distinct from eldership, which is clearly local: *ordain elders in every city, as I commanded thee.* The distinction is straightforward, and it is brought out by comparing these very passages.

So Also Is the Christ

The close of verse 12 is remarkable and important: *so also is Christ.* Darby renders it with the definite article: *so also is the Christ.* This is not Christ simply as a personal name but as a title — and here it refers to what has been called the mystical Christ: the Head in union with all the members. It is the head and the body together that are called the Christ. A similar thought appears in Ephesians 2 as *the one new man* — a new thing brought about when the Spirit came down and formed this body of which Christ is the Head.

It is characteristic of what God has made, in making *the* Christ, that He should have members. As 1 Corinthians 12 itself says in verse 27: *ye are the body of*

Christ, and members in particular. And as one beloved brother used to quote from Ephesians: *Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it* — not its. There is one church, one bride, one temple. And there is one Christ — Head and members together, one.

Verse 13 — The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Verse 13 introduces something of the greatest importance: *for also in the power of one Spirit we have all been baptized into one body* — so Darby renders it, with the tense carefully preserved. Not *we are baptized*, which could suggest an ongoing or repeatedly occurring event, but *we have all been baptized.* In one of his letters, Darby drew specific attention to the Greek tense here as indicating not an ongoing process.

The views on baptism of the Holy Spirit are very considerable in Christendom — ranging from a once-for-all corporate act at Pentecost, to individual baptisms repeated each time a person is saved. Someone might argue there were no Gentiles at Pentecost and no bondmen, so this must be repetitious. But consider: when Christ was raised from the dead, were we there? God comprehends us within those mighty acts. As Ephesians makes plain, we were raised with Him and seated with Him in the heavenlies — though we were not present historically at those events. Those were once-for-all mighty acts of God, made good to each individual believer as they come to faith. The same principle applies here.

How the Work Is Made Good — Ephesians 1:13

Ephesians 1:13 gives the answer to how this is made personally good to each one: *In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.* The Ephesians received the same Holy Spirit of promise that the disciples received at Pentecost. The designation *Holy Spirit of promise* is

there to connect our minds to that great act — the same Spirit, the same promise, fulfilled to each one as they come to faith.

So the baptism of the Holy Spirit is one corporate act, forming the body. It was not repeatable. You do not form the body many times. The body was formed on the day of Pentecost. And the mind of God comprehends all the members of the body, up to the rapture, within that one act — made good to each individually as they believe. That is how we have all been baptized into one body.

How the Body Was Formed — Acts 2

Acts 2:32–33 narrates the event plainly: Christ was raised from the dead; being exalted to the right hand of God, He received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost; and He poured out what is now seen and heard. So the Lord, exalted in the glory, receives the Holy Spirit of promise from the Father — a fresh thing in connection with the formation of His body below, of which He was to be the Head. He then sheds the Spirit forth and sends Him down. Christ is the baptizer; the Holy Spirit is the power by which the baptism into one body is accomplished. That is how it took place historically, fulfilling the promises given in John's Gospel and in Luke 24 and Acts 1.

When did this baptism take place? Acts 2. Can anyone point to a better place? That is where it happened — with the manifestations of the Spirit's coming, the sound of a rushing mighty wind, the cloven tongues as of fire. It is quite plain. Those disciples already had faith in the Lord Jesus. They already believed in His resurrection. They had divine life from God. They were waiting — and they were not yet members of one body. When the Spirit came down in that way, He took them and united them together in a unity represented by the human body, in union with the One in heaven as their Head. That is what came about at Pentecost.

What Unites to Christ

Faith does not by itself unite to Christ in the sense of forming the body. Possession of divine life does not do it either. Old Testament saints had both faith and divine life — and they were not members of the body. What unites to Christ as members of the body is this operation of the Holy Spirit, consequent upon faith. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts. The seal of the Spirit brings us into Christ — uniting us to the one body and to the Head in heaven.

As Ephesians shows, we are in Christ — and the same Spirit is the means by which that is so. Faith in itself does not do it; life in itself does not do it; but the action of the Holy Spirit, as a consequence of both, is what unites to Christ and forms the body. There is tremendous confusion on these points in Christendom. It is well to be clear on them.

And we have been all made to drink into one Spirit — there is also the power of satisfaction within the Spirit. This indwelling, this being in Christ, this being made to drink of one Spirit, this baptism into one body — all of it is unique to the present dispensation. It was not true of Old Testament saints, and it cannot simply be read forward into the millennium. It is the distinctive blessing of this present time. What a blessing it is.

— Study ends —