

Preparation for the Lord's Supper

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon passionately urges believers to undertake sincere and thorough self-examination before partaking in the Lord's Supper, emphasizing the necessity of genuine faith and repentance.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:28

Topics: "Self-Examination", "Lord's Supper", "Faith and Repentance"

Description

In this devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon calls believers to a deep and earnest self-examination before participating in the Lord's Supper. He stresses the importance of genuine faith in Christ's incarnation and atoning sacrifice, as well as the necessity of forgiveness and sincere remembrance of Jesus. Spurgeon warns against superficial or hypocritical participation and encourages personal responsibility in approaching the Table with a humble and searching heart.

Transcript

"Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup." 1 Corinthians 11:28.

"Let a man examine himself." That is, any man—every man who intends to eat of that bread and drink of that cup. The word is indefinite that it may be understood to be universal. No man is to come to that Table, no woman is to draw near without the previous self-examination. No age will excuse us, for there have been aged hypocrites, as well as young deceivers. No office will exonerate us from this examination, for there was a Judas even among the Apostles. The highest degree in the Church of God may consist with the most rotten formality. We are to examine ourselves each time we come. Each man is to do so. No one is to shirk the personal duty. Everyone is to undertake it as in the sight of God. Brothers and Sisters, you members of the Church about to come around this Table, give heed to the mandate of the Holy Spirit, by the inspired Apostle! "Let each one here examine himself, and so let him eat of this bread."

"Let a man examine himself." The word is forcible. Let him make inquisition into his own soul as to whether all is right or not. Let him search diligently, tracing out every symptom that looks unfavorable, if, perhaps, that symptom may reveal the truth. Let him dwell upon every dark side or ill-looking spot, if, perhaps, those dark signs should mean more than is apparent on the surface. We are not to trifle with ourselves by making a superficial survey. Let a man examine himself as does the dealer in precious metals when he thrusts the ore into the fire, knowing that only the gold will come out, while the dross will be consumed. Put yourself into a crucible! Heat the furnace of examination seven times hotter than before, for since your heart will, if possible, escape from knowing the truth, be resolved that it shall know it, and the worst of it,

too! Let a man review, test, prove, search, try! In all the strongest words that I could find that mean the fullest scrutiny, would I put the language of the Apostle, "Let a man examine himself."

"Let a man examine himself" He need not be so particular to examine those that surround him. If there should be unworthy communicants at the Table, his communing will not thereby be damaged. Though some may have intruded where they ought not to be, yet if your heart and mind shall come near to Christ in actual fellowship, we shall not have the less indulgence from our Lord because a Judas happened to be there. "Let a man examine himself." Let it be personal work. I know there is an examination through which the Church member among us passes, when such as are experienced in the faith ask, "What do you know of these things? What is your faith touching this and that? Have you believed? Have you repented?" Such an examination, however, must never content you. I pray you never feel that it is any certificate of genuine discipleship to have been seen by the Elders, or to have had the pastor satisfied of your conversion. We are poor, fallible creatures—we cannot profess to search the heart—no, we never did profess it! It is but your outward life and your profession that we are called upon to judge at all. You must not go by our examination, but, "Let a man examine himself." You are to look into your own heart, with your own eyes and ask to have them enlightened by the Holy Spirit! You are to hold the balance, yourselves, and weigh your soul therein. You are not to be satisfied with a second-hand judgment, or with another man's search! Take the candle yourself, Man! Go through every corner and every crevice. Sweep out the old leaven and so keep the feast in simplicity of heart. "Let a man examine himself."

"Andso," says the Apostle, "let him eat of that bread." That is to say, the examination is to be seasonable. It is to come always at the time of the eating of the bread and the drinking of the wine. It should always be the prelude to communion. Examination should preface enjoyment. You should see whether you ought to be there and have a right to be there and, that ascertained, then you should come—but not till then! Is it not a very significant circumstance that the very first time our Lord took the bread and broke it, and instituted this Supper, there was at that very time a selfexamination going on—and they then made an appeal to the Lord, Himself, at the conclusion, for each one said, when the question was asked as to who it was that would betray Him, "Lord, is it I?" "Lord, is it I?"—not at all an unsuitable question to be passed round tonight, when we shall break bread, and hear it said, "One of you will betray Me." Ah, Brothers and Sisters, I fear there are many more than one here among professors who will betray Him! Perhaps there are scores, if not hundreds, among so large a mass of professing Christians who will not prove, after all, to be genuine! Then let the question, though it stirs the anguish of your souls, pass round among you, "Lord, is it I?" "Lord, is it I?" Nor let any man eat of this bread, or drink of this cup till he has humbly in his soul sought to put it to his conscience, that he may investigate this matter whether he is Christ's or not!

Now, dear Brothers and Sisters, for a few minutes we shall look at the matter about which we are to examine ourselves. And then we shall press upon you this examination, by giving you a few reasons for it May God grant us a blessing in this searching business!

I. CONCERNING WHAT WE ARE TO EXAMINE.

You will observe that the text does not tell us, "Let a man examine himself as to this or that particular, and so let him eat." He is to examine himself, but the Apostle does not say about what. The inference is that he is to examine himself about this Supper. He is to examine himself as to whether he has a right to eat of this bread and to drink of this wine. The Supper gives us the clue, then, as to what we are to examine ourselves upon. I shall see before me, presently, broken bread and the wine cup filled with the red wine. These two things are the emblems—the bread of the body of Christ, which was bruised and made to suffer

for our sake—the wine of that precious blood of Christ by which sin is pardoned and souls are redeemed.

I have no right to touch these emblems unless in my soul I believe the facts that they represent Shall I not begin to question myself, then? Do I accept, as a certain fact that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us? Do I believe that God descended from the highest Throne of Glory and became a Man born of woman? Do I believe that He suffered in human flesh, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God? Do I believe that in His blood, which was "shed for many," there is a virtue for the putting away of sin and making Atonement to Almighty God, and that so sinners may be accepted in the Beloved? Unless I believe these things, I am clearly a hypocrite, a terrible hypocrite, if I dare to come to this Table at all! I am perverse among the perverse to thrust myself in to touch the emblems when I do not accept the facts which those emblems set forth! Now, every man here can easily examine himself by that test, but I hope the most of us here would say, "We do believe those facts." Yes, but do you believe them as facts that are forcible in themselves and fraught with consequences? Do you apprehend them in their amazing weight and their stupendous bearing upon the judgment of God and the destiny of men? God made flesh—God Incarnate—Jesus, Immanuel, suffering to put away the sins of His people—The Christ of God presenting salvation to every soul that trusts in Him! Why, this is news such as never stirred even Paradise, itself, before! It is the best, highest and most wondrous news that angels ever heard! We ought to so hear and accept these facts in that same spirit that characterized them when they transpired, in order to duly discern their importance, or we have no right to come here!

Furthermore, Brothers and Sisters. Every man who eats of the bread and drinks of the wine sets forth in emblem by the eating of the bread that the flesh of Christ is his, and by the drinking of the wine that the blood of Christ is his. Because he has possession of these things, he, therefore, comes to eat as men eat their own bread, or to drink as men drink their own wine. Now, dear Hearer, the question asked of you is this—Have you an interest in the body and the blood of Christ? "How can I know my interest therein?" asks one. You may know it thus—Do you fully and alone rely upon Jesus Christ for your salvation? Do you implicitly trust the merits of His agonies? Do you, without any other confidence, cast yourself fully upon the great atoning Sacrifice and transactions of Calvary? If so, that faith gives you Christ! It is the evidence that Christ is yours—you need not be afraid to come and take the wine when you so manifestly have the thing that is signified thereby. You may come—you are invited to come—you cannot stay away without sin if Christ, indeed, is yours!

The question may assume another form. This Supper was instituted that we might remember Christ in it. A question, then, for each one—Can you remember Christ? Will coming here help you to remember Jesus Christ? If not, you must not come. How can you remember what you do not know? And how shall you remember at all aright, One in whom you have no part nor lot? To remember Christ as a mere person in history is of no more use than to remember Julius Cesar, or

Napoleon Bonaparte! To remember Christ, who loved you and gave Himself for you—this is the choice remembrance that will be beneficial to your spirits. Beloved, I am quite certain that sometimes in what is called, "the Sacrament," there is little or no recollection of Christ. Men and women come to it with no idea of remembering Him. They think that there is something in the thing, itself—some holiness in eating the bread and drinking the wine—some Grace bestowed by the priestly hands that administer the emblems of the Passion. But oh, it is not so! This is not to receive the Lord's Supper—this is but Popish idolatry! This is not the true worship of the child of God! You come to the Table to remember Him! And only as far as those signs help you to remember Him—to trust Him, to love Him—only so far do they become a means of Grace to you! There is no latent moral virtue in material substances! No regeneration lurks in water! No

confirmation in Grace streams from prelatric hands! There is no sanctity in lawn sleeves! There is no holiness in bread and nothing devout in wine! These are just outward and visible signs. The holiness, the sanctity, the Grace must lie in your own hearts as you lovingly receive these symbols and draw near with true spirits to the Lord who bought you with His blood! Ask yourselves, then—do you remember Him? Would these things help you to remember Him? If not, you have no business here.

It may be that some child of God here tonight is not fit to come to the Table. You may be startled, perhaps, at that remark, but I venture to suppose such a thing possible! And if it should happen to turn out to be the case, I pray that Brother or Sister to take the admonition home! Is there any Brother whom you have offended, whose forgiveness you have not sought, or is there anyone who has offended you, to whom you have not rendered forgiveness? I think that what our Lord said about coming to the altar and leaving the gift before the altar until first we have been reconciled to our brother—though this is no altar at all—may be with all righteousness supposed concerning this Table! How can you expect fellowship with Christ with an unforgiving heart? How can you love God, whom you have not seen, if you do not love your brother, whom you have seen? If it is so hard for you to forgive, how hard will it be for you to be forgiven? An unforgiving spirit shuts you out of Heaven. Why, Man, you cannot even perform the lowliest act—you cannot pray! You, cannot say, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." And if you cannot pray, much less can you commune! Oh, see to that, and let each man and woman examine themselves upon that!

In pressing this subject upon you, may I be permitted to say, very earnestly, that the right way to examine ourselves before coming to this Table is by the rule which is laid down in Scripture. Examine yourselves by the tests and proofs of the Spirit which are spoken of in God's Word. Just as you would examine another, impartially—

"Nothing extenuate, Nor anything set down in malice"— so must you examine yourselves. Alas, we have one rule for others and another rule for ourselves! How mistakenly quick-sighted are we to discover the imperfections and infirmities of others of God's people, while our own glaring sins scarcely give our conscience a twinge! We go about with great beams in our eyes, all the while wondering why our Brothers and Sisters cannot see the mote that is in theirs! Judge yourselves! Judge yourselves and let the severity of your judgment upon your fellow Christians be now turned upon yourselves! It will be much more to your profit and much more according to the rules of Christian charity. God grant we may, none of us, be afraid of the strictest rules of Scripture in their sternest form. Alas, Brothers and Sisters, we often stop short in our self-examinations just when they might be of use to us, like the patient who tears off the plaster just when it begins to work, or ceases to receive the medicine precisely when it has reached a point in which it would be useful! Press home, press home, the grave questions and anxieties that lurk within you! Never be afraid to be probed to the quick and to be cut to the core. Make no provision for self-deception! Ask the Lord to lay bare your hearts, right bare, before His Omniscient eyes. And as you are thus examining, do not flinch, do not mince matters, do not trifle, do not be partial, but judge yourselves truly and thoroughly, lest, after all, you should be mistaken! And lest, after coming to this Table, you should be banished from the Marriage Supper of the Lamb!

Thus much upon the points which are in debate—about which we are to examine our fitness to come to this Table. Allow me now, as best I can—

II. TO PRESS THIS VERY IMPORTANT SUBJECT UPON YOU, WITH SOME REASONS WHY THERE

SHOULD BE SUCH A SELF-EXAMINATION.

I might say, Brothers and Sisters, that such an examination should be used because self-knowledge is always valuable. The old Greeks, whose wonderful sayings often verged upon Inspiration, used to say, "Man, know yourself!" It is ill for a man to be acquainted with foreign countries and to know nothing of his own—to understand other men's farms and to let his own run to waste—to be conversant with other men's health and to be dying of a secret disease! To study other men's characters, but to allow his own character to be obnoxious in the sight of God. Know yourselves! Nothing will pay you better than to search your own hearts and to know yourselves. Of all stock-taking, this is one of the most beneficial. It will often be the death of pride when a man finds out what he really is. Self-righteousness will fly before such a searching, as owls fly before the rising sun! Know yourself and you are on the road to knowing Christ, for the knowledge of self will humble you, will make you feel your need of Jesus and may, in the hands of God the Holy Spirit, lead you to the finding of the Savior! Oh, Men and Women, how is it that you have so many acquaintances, such a large circle of friends and yet do not make acquaintance with yourselves? While you will read much of literature, you read not your own hearts! You commune with others, yet you commune not with yourselves and do not know yourselves. I pray you examine yourselves, if for no other reason than because such lore is among the most precious that a man can gain!

Examine yourselves, again, you professed Christians, because it is a marvelously easy thing for us to be deceived and to continue to be deceived. Of course, every man likes to be flattered. Whether he believes it is so or not, this is a universal truth, and any man—I care not who he may be—is very easily to be persuaded that all is right with him. Satan, too, will help your natural tendencies, your partiality to yourselves. He only wishes to lull you to sleep and to rock you in the cradle of delusion. All things around a man conspire to help him to delude himself. The notion of Grace which is commonly entertained, the popularity of religion, the ease with which a man can join a church, the littleness of persecution in these days—all these things help to make it a very easy passage by which a man may glide along, until even when he dies he may still believe that he is on the road to Heaven, while all the while he has been going post-haste to Hell! Oh, since it is so easy to be deceived, and it is your soul that is in jeopardy, I beseech you examine yourselves!

Besides, my dear Friends, you know how some are deceived. Charge your memories a minute. Do you not know some among your own acquaintance that are deceived? Ah, you readily remember them! But do you know that there were persons sitting in other parts of the Tabernacle who were thinking of you while you were thinking of them! You said of such a one, "Ah, I have watched her at home. I know that noisy tongue of hers, she is no Christian." And that very woman was just whispering to herself, "Ah, I know him. I have traded at his shop. I know those short weights of his—he is no Christian." Ah, you do not want God to condemn you—if you were only allowed to speak, you would condemn yourselves! But if such is the case, that we so readily can find out that others are deceived, is not the question one that is worth the asking, "May we not be deceived, ourselves?" Oh, let it come home. May not the preacher be deceived? May not Elders and deacons, who have been in honor these many years, be, nevertheless, rotten at heart? May not members of this Church who have been at this Table from the very beginning, almost from their childhood have, after all, had but a superficial godliness that will not stand the fire, that shall try every man's work, of what sort it is? Therefore, I beseech you, since many are deceived, examine yourselves and so come to this Table.

Further, remember that it is important for professing Christians to do this, beyond all others, because, perhaps, there is no greater bar to the reception of Grace in all this world than the belief that you have

Grace already. It were a mercy if some here present had never joined the Church. Sad that I should say it, but it is so. It were a mercy to themselves that they had never professed to be Christians, because now, if we preach repentance, they say, "I repented years ago." If we talk of faith in the Savior, they say, "I have faith—I joined the Church and avowed my faith." If we speak of Christian knowledge—they have Christian knowledge—though it is the knowledge that puffs up. They have the imitation of all the Graces and, as it is sometimes very difficult to know which is the real gem and which is the paste gem that imitates it, so these people live so much like Christians, in many respects, that it is hard even for themselves to discover that they are not rich and increased in goods, but are naked, and poor, and miserable! If I were out of Christ, I would wish to be out of the Church. If I had no faith in Him, would that I had no profession of Him! If there is any soul in any place that is least likely to be saved, it is an unregenerate soul inside the Church, participating in Christian ordinances and dead while it lives! Search yourselves, then on this account.

And let me add another solemn word. Search yourselves because within a short time, at the very longest, you will be upon the bed of death and there, if not before, there will be deep searching of heart. When the outward man decays and the flesh is melting away, you will need something more than profession to lean on. Sacraments, and going to places of worship will prove but poor things to bear you up in the midst of the billows of death! How must a man feel when he puts out on that dread sea with his lifebelt and finds it will not bear his weight! When he leaps into his lifeboat that he had hoped would bear him safely to the haven, and finds that every timber is strained and that it leaks—and he sinks into the flood. Oh, find out your mistakes while yet there is time to rectify them! I beseech you by the living God, whose face of fire you shall soon see, prepare yourselves for His judgment as well as for the judgment of your own conscience in the hour of death, for every man must be weighed in the balance! No mere pretender shall pass the gates of bliss. Destitute of faith, it matters not how bright your profession—you shall be banished from His Presence! If it is not Grace-work and heart-work, you may have eaten or drunk in His Presence and He may have taught in your streets, but He will never know you! If you have never confessed your sins in secret to the great High Priest. If you have never laid your hand upon that precious head that bore the sin of His elect. If you have never seen in solemn transfer your iniquities passed over to Him—and if your faith has never recognized that transaction and rejoiced in it—oh, beware, beware, beware, for in the last tremendous day your professions shall be but a painted pageantry for you to go to Hell in! Yes, worse than that, among the firewood of your burning that shall flash most furiously with devouring fire, will be the hollow sticks of your base profession, your bastard godliness, your counterfeit graces, your glitter that was not golden, your profession that was not based upon possession!

Oh, dear Brothers and Sisters, for these reasons let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of this bread.

But now, supposing this to be all done and we have come to this answer, "I am not in Christ. I am not a Christian. I have not believed"? Then, away, away, away from this Table! But where shall I send you? I will send you to the Cross. Though you may not come to the Table, you may come to Jesus!

But suppose your answer should be, "I am very unworthy and sinful, but still, I have believed in Jesus, though I yet see much in myself that is evil." Dear Brothers and Sisters, that is not the question! Preparation for the Lord's Supper does not lie in perfect sanctification, but in true faith in Jesus! If, then, you have made sure of this, have done with the examination—I mean for tonight—because after you have examined yourself, it does not then say, "Keep on," but, "So let him eat," and I do not like that examination to stick in the throat so that you cannot digest the dainty morsels of the Savior's precious body. It is done! You have examined and you know Him! You have believed in Him and trusted that He is able to keep you.

Now, then, take care that you eat! I mean not merely eat with the mouth and drink with the throat, but now take care to pray that you may have real fellowship with the Incarnate God, gratefully magnifying the Grace that has made you to differ and cheerfully accepting the precious Person who is the ground of your reliance, of the life of your soul!

God grant you now, having passed the door and shown your entrance ticket as true Christians, to sit and eat bread in the Kingdom of God!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: MATTHEW 6:1-24; 1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-16.

Verse 1. Take heed that you do not do your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise you have no reward of your Father which is in Heaven. The motive which leads a man to give will form the true estimate of what he does. If he gives to be seen of men, then when he is seen of men he has the reward he sought for—and he will never have any other. Let us never do our alms or good works before men, to be seen of them.

2-5. Therefore when you do your alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when you do alms, let not your left hand know what your right hand does, that your alms may be in secret: and your Father which sees in secret, shall Himself reward you openly. And when you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward I have heard very great commendation given to certain Easterns, because at the hour of the rising of the sun, or the hour when the sound is heard from the summit of the mosque, wherever they may be, they put themselves in the posture of prayer. God forbid I should rob them of any credit they deserve, but far be it from us ever to imitate them! We are not to be ashamed of our prayers, but they are not things for the public street! They are intended for God's eyes and God's ears, only.

6, 7. But you, when you pray, enter into your closet and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father which is in secret; and your Father, which sees in secret, shall reward you openly. But when you pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking. It is not very easy to repeat the same words often without it becoming a vain repetition. A repetition, however, is not forbidden, but a "vain" repetition. And how greatly do they err who measure prayers by the yard! They think they have prayed so much because they have prayed so long, whereas it is the work of the heart—the true pouring out of the desire before God—that is the thing to be looked at. Quality not quantity! Truth, not length. Oftentimes the shortest prayers have the most prayer in them.

8, 9. Be not you, therefore, like they: for your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask Him. After this manner therefore pray you. And then He gives us a model of prayer which never can be excelled—containing all the parts of devotion. They do well who model their prayers upon this.

9-13 Our Father which are in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen. Our Savior now makes a remark upon this prayer and on one particular part of it which has stumbled a great many.

14, 15. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. There are some who have altered this and pray in this fashion, "Forgive us our debts as we desire to forgive our debtors." It will not do! You will have to desire God to forgive you, and desire in vain if you pray in that fashion! It must come to this point of literal, immediate, completed forgiveness of every offense committed against you if you expect God to forgive you. There is no wriggling out of it. The man who refuses to forgive, refuses to be forgiven! God grant that we may, none of us, tolerate malice in our hearts. Anger glances in the bosom of wise men—it only burns in the heart of the foolish. May we quench it and feel that we do freely, fully and heartily forgive, knowing that we are forgiven!

16. Moreover when you fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. Simpletons praise them—think much of them—and they plume themselves thereon and think themselves the very best of men. They have their reward.

17, 18. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that you appear not unto men to fast, but unto your Father which is in secret, and your Father, which sees in secret, shall reward you openly. Yet have I heard persons speak of certain emaciated ecclesiastics as being such wonderfully holy men. "How they must have fasted! They look like it. You can see it in their faces." Probably much more likely produced by a fault in their digestion, than by anything else! And if not—if we are to suppose that the skinniness of a man, his person, is to be the token of his holiness—then the living skeleton was a saint to perfection! But we are not beguiled by such follies as these. The Christian fasts but he takes care that no one shall know it. He wears no ring or token even when his heart is heavy. Full often he puts on a cheerful air, lest by any means he should communicate unnecessary sorrow to others! And he will be cheerful and happy in the midst of company, to prevent their being sad, for it is enough for him to be sad, himself, and sad before his Father's face.

19-21. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal But lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. There is many a way of sending your treasure before you to Heaven. God's poor are His money-boxes—His bankers. You can pass your treasure over to Heaven by their means. And the work of evangelizing the world by the labors of God's servants in the ministry of the Gospel—you can help this, also. There is much need for your plenty. Thus also you can pass your treasure over into the King's bank and your heart will follow it! I have heard of one who said his religion did not cost him a shilling a year—and it was remarked that very probably it would have been expensive at the price. You will find people form a pretty accurate estimate of the value of their own religion by the proportion which they are prepared to sacrifice for it.

22. The light of the body is the eye. If, therefore, your eye is single. If your motive is single—if you have only one motive—and that a right one—the master one of glorifying God—if your eye is single.

22, 23. Your whole body shall be full of light. But if your eye is evil, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness/When a man's highest motive is himself, what a dark and selfish nature he has! But when his highest motive is his God, what brightness of light will shine upon all.

24. No man can serve two masters. He can serve two persons very readily. For that matter, he can serve twenty, but not two masters. There cannot be two master principles in a man's heart, or master passions in a man's soul. "No man can serve two masters."

24. For either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammoi.. Though some men's lives are a long experiment of how far they can serve the two.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-16

Verse 1. And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. The Church at Corinth consisted of persons of large education and great abilities. It was one of those churches that had given up the one-man system, where everybody talked as he liked—a very knowing Church, and a Church of Christians, too. But for all that, Christian babies! And though they thought themselves to be so great, yet the Apostle says that he never spoke to them as to spiritual men—he kept to the simple elements—regarding the carnal part as being too much in them as yet to be able to drink down spiritual things.

2. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for up to now you were not able to bear it, neither yet now are you able. How grateful we ought to be that there is milk and that this milk does feed the soul—that the simplest Truths of Christianity contain in them all that the soul needs—just as milk is a diet upon which the body could be sustained without anything else. Yet how we ought to desire to grow that we may not always be upon a milk diet but that we may be able to digest the strong meat—the high Doctrine of the deep things of God. These are for men, not for babes. Let the babes be thankful for the milk, but let us aspire to be strong men that we may feed on meat.

3. For you are yet carnal: for where as there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal and walk as men? A united Church, you may conclude, is a growing Church—perhaps a grown Church! But a disunited Church, split up into factions where every man is seeking position and trying to be noted—such a Church is a Church of babes. They are carnal and walk as men.

4. For while one says, I am of Paul: and another, I am of Apollos, are you not carnal? Instead of that, they should all have striven together for the defense of the common faith of Jesus Christ. No greater symptom of mere infancy in true religion than the setting up of the names of leaders or the preference for this or that peculiar form of Doctrine, instead of endeavoring to grasp the whole of the Truth of God wherever one can find it.

5. 6. Who, then, is Paul? And who is Apollos but ministers by whom you believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered: but God gave the increase. Let God, then, have all the glory! Be grateful for the planter and grateful for the waterer, yes, and grateful to them as well. But still, let the stress of your gratitude be given to Him without whom watering and planting would be in vain!

7, 8. So then neither is he that plants anything, neither he that waters, but God that gives the increase. Now he that plants and he that waters are one. They are pursuing the same design! And Apollos and Paul were one in heart. They were true servants of one Master.

8, 9. And every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are laborers together with God: you are God's husbandry, you are God's building. The Church is built up. God is He who builds

it up—the Master of the work, but He employs His ministers under Him to be builders.

10-13. According to the Grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds thereon. But let every man take heed how he builds thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest. For the day shall declare it because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is! It is very easy to build up a Church quickly. It is very easy to make a great excitement in religion and become very famous as a soul-winner. Very easy. But time tries everything! If there were no other fire than the mere fire of time, it would suffice to test a man's work. And when a church crumbles away almost as soon as it is got together—when a church declines from the Doctrines which it professed to hold, when the teaching of the eminent teacher is proved, after all, to have been fallacious and to have been erroneous in practical results, then what he has built comes to nothing! Oh, dear Friends, what little we do, we ought to aspire to do for eternity. If you shall never lay the brush to the canvas but once, make an indelible stroke with it! If only one work of sort shall come from the statuary's workshop, let it be something that will live all down the ages! But we are in such a mighty hurry—we make a lot of things that die with us—transient results. We are not careful enough as to what we build with. May God grant that this truth may sink into our minds! Let us remember that if it is hard building with gold and silver, and harder still building with precious stones, yet what is built will stand the fire! It is easy building with wood—and still easier with hay and stubble—but then there will be only a handful of ashes left of a whole lifework if we build with these.

14-15. If any man's work abides which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. If he meant right—if he endeavored to serve God as a worker, though he may have uttered many errors and have been mistaken—(and which of us has not been?)— he shall be saved, though his work must be burnt.

16. Know you not that you are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? Do you know it? He says, "Know you not?" but I might leave out the, "not," and say, "Know you that you are the Temple of God?" What a wonderful fact it is! Within the body of the saint, God dwells, as in a Temple. How some men injure their bodies or utterly despise them, though they would not so do if they understood that they are the Temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in them.

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