

CRUCIAL POINTS OF THE TRUTH IN 1 CORINTHIANS

BY WITNESS LEE

To pick up the crucial points in the New Testament books is the way to uplift the standard of the truth. If we neglect this way, we will remain in a low standard of knowing and speaking the truth. We must pick up these high, crucial points, learn to get into them, learn to teach the saints, and learn to speak these things in our daily life.

Christ Being Ours

In 1 Corinthians 1:2 there is the expression *our Lord Jesus Christ, ... theirs and ours*. Christ as the all-inclusive One belongs to all believers. The crucial point of chapter 1 is that Christ is ours. We have been called by the faithful God into the fellowship of this Christ who is ours (v. 9). That Christ is ours means that Christ is our portion. We have been called into the fellowship, that is, into the participation, the enjoyment, of this portion, and this portion is God's power and God's wisdom to us (v. 24). In God's economy we have been put into this portion, and God has made this portion our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (v. 30).

The Depths of God

In chapter 1 Christ is our portion. In chapter 2 the crucial point is Christ as the depths of God (v. 10). This point needs the entire chapter 2 as a background. The Christ who is the depths of God is the very Christ in God's mystery (v. 7). The very Christ in God's mystery whom God dispenses to us is a kind of blessing and enjoyment, "which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not come up in man's heart" (v. 9). Christ as the depths of God is Christ in God's mystery as the divine blessings dispensed to us, which eye has never seen and ear has never heard and which have never come up in man's heart. All this is for our glory (v. 7). To enjoy such a deep Christ is to enter into glory. This is altogether God's wisdom.

God's Building

In chapter 3 both the growth of the plant life and the transformation of the minerals are for God's building. The believers who have been regenerated in Christ with God's life are God's cultivated land with its plants, a farm in God's new creation to grow Christ, so that precious material may be produced for God's building (v. 9). Hence, we are not only God's farm but also God's building. Corporately, we as the church of God have Christ planted in us. Christ must also grow in us and out of us produce, in the sense of this chapter, not fruit but the precious materials of gold, silver, and precious stones for the building of God's habitation on earth (v. 12). Thus, the building of God, the house of God, the church, is the increase of Christ, the enlargement of Christ in His unlimitedness.

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As God's farm with planting, watering, and growing (v. 6), the church should produce plants, but the proper materials for the building up of the church are gold, silver, and precious stones, all of which are minerals. Hence, the thought of transformation is implied here. We need not only to grow in life but also to be transformed in life. In the church God transforms us from the plant life into minerals, which is fully illustrated by the petrification of wood into stone. Transformation produces the divine building materials of God—gold, silver, and precious stones—which signify the various experiences of Christ in the virtues and attributes of the Triune God.

The Destiny of the New Testament Believers in the Eyes of the World

First Corinthians 4:9 says, "I think, God has set forth us the apostles last of all as doomed to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men." In Paul's time, when criminals fought with wild beasts in the amphitheater for the entertainment of the populace, the criminals were exhibited last of all. The apostles considered themselves as criminals doomed to death before the world, not as kings destined to reign. In 4:13 Paul says, "Defamed we exhort. We have become as the offscouring of the world, the scum of all things, until now." The destiny of the New Testament believers in the eyes of the world is first to be a spectacle like the criminals in the Roman amphitheater, then to be despised, looked down upon, and considered as the offscouring of the world and the scum of all things.

Christ as the Unleavened Bread to Be Our Feast

The crucial point in chapter 5 is Christ as the unleavened bread to be a feast to us (v. 8). This feast refers to the Feast of Unleavened Bread as a continuation of the Passover (Exo. 12:15-20). It lasted seven days, a period of completion, signifying the entire period of our Christian life, from the day of our conversion to the day of rapture. This is a long feast that we must keep, not with the sin of our old nature, the old leaven, but with unleavened bread, which is the Christ of our new nature as our nourishment and enjoyment. Only He is the life supply of sincerity and truth, absolutely pure, without mixture, and full of reality. The feast is a time for the enjoyment of the banquet. The entire Christian life should be such a feast, such an enjoyment of Christ as our banquet, the rich supply of life.

Being Joined to the Lord as One Spirit

In 1 Corinthians 6 the crucial point is being joined to the Lord as one spirit so that our body may be the temple of the Holy Spirit (vv. 17-20). Verse 17 says, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." Then verses 19 and 20 continue, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price. So then glorify God in your body." The crucial thing in these few verses is that being joined to the Lord as one spirit is so that we could be the temple of God. This implies that when you are joined to the Lord as one spirit in your spirit, this joining should affect your body, control your body, and keep your body from anything that is evil, especially from fornication. Then, not only is your spirit the habitation of God but also your body. For your body to be a temple of the Holy Spirit means that your union with the Lord as one spirit affects your body in a positive sense. This effect is to separate your body, to sanctify your body, so that not only your spirit but even your body is the temple of God. Thus, your entire being becomes the temple of God.

Human Opinions Given with the Spirit of God

The crucial point in chapter 7 is that human opinions could be given with the Spirit of God. In verse 10 the apostle says, "I charge, not I but the Lord." In verse 12 he

says, "I say, I, not the Lord." In verse 25 he says, "I have no commandment of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who has been shown mercy by the Lord to be faithful." Then in verse 40 he says, "According to my opinion; but I think that I also have the Spirit of God." All these words indicate the New Testament principle of incarnation (that is, God and man, man and God becoming one). This differs drastically from the principle of Old Testament prophecy—speaking for God. In the Old Testament the word of Jehovah came upon a prophet (Jer. 1:2; Ezek. 1:3), the prophet being simply the mouthpiece of God. But in the New Testament the Lord becomes one with His apostles, and they become one with Him; thus they both speak together. His word becomes their word, and whatever they utter is His word. Hence, the apostle's charge is the Lord's charge (1 Cor. 7:10). What he says, though not by the Lord, still becomes a part of the divine revelation in the New Testament (v. 12). Paul is so one with the Lord that even when he gives his own opinion, not the commandment of the Lord (v. 25), he still thinks that he also has the Spirit of God (v. 40). Paul does not claim definitely to have the Spirit of God, but he thinks that he also has the Spirit of God. This is the highest spirituality; it is based upon the principle of incarnation.

Running the Race to Obtain the Reward

In chapter 9 the point we should pick up is the matter of running the race to obtain the reward. In verse 17 Paul says that if he preaches the gospel voluntarily, he has a reward; but if not of his own will, he has been entrusted with a stewardship. Paul continues to say, "What then is my reward? That in preaching the gospel I may present the gospel without charge, so as not to use to the full my right in the gospel" (v. 18). Then he continues in verses 24 through 27:

Do you not know that those who run on a racecourse all run, but one receives the prize? Run in this way, that you may lay hold. And everyone who contends exercises self-control in all things; they then, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible. I therefore run in this way, not as though without a clear aim; I box in this way, not as though beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest perhaps having preached to others, I myself may become disapproved.

The crucial point is to run the race to obtain the reward. Here Paul uses two illustrations from the Olympics: running a race and contending in a game. Both are illustrations for our Christian walk and work. Our Christian walk and work are like running in a racecourse and contending in a game. The reward that the Lord will award His overcoming saints who win the race is something in addition to salvation. We, His believers, have all received His salvation through faith in Him. This was settled once for all. But whether we shall be rewarded by Him depends upon how we run the race.

Enjoying Christ for Our Fellowship with All the Saints

The main point in chapter 10 is the enjoyment of Christ for our fellowship with all the saints. The beginning of this chapter refers to the eating and drinking by the children of Israel. "All ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank of a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ" (vv. 3-4). They ate the manna and drank the water from the rock. At the end of verse 4, Paul indicates definitely that this is a type, because he says, "The rock was Christ." The manna must therefore also be Christ, and the living water must be the very Spirit that comes out of Christ, the cleft rock. These two items are for enjoyment.

In verses 14 through 22 of this chapter the Lord's table is mentioned. According to the context of the entire chapter, our enjoyment at the Lord's table should equal the

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Israelites' enjoyment of eating manna, the spiritual food, and drinking the spiritual drink, the living water. Today we enjoy the Lord's table, where the manna is the bread on the table, and the spiritual drink is in the cup on the table.

God's people should be a people of enjoyment. Their enjoyment is of God Himself embodied in Christ. In the Old Testament the very God was embodied in manna and in the spiritual drink that came out of the rock. Then in the New Testament God is embodied in the bread and the cup. We eat Him, we drink Him, and thus we enjoy Him. This is for our fellowship of the blood of Christ and of the Body of Christ. This means that we have fellowship in the Body and that we have fellowship in the blood by our eating and drinking. When we enjoy the Lord by eating and drinking Him, we have fellowship with all the saints. Our fellowship with all the saints is in our enjoyment of the Lord.

The Universal Headship

In 11:3 Paul says, "I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ." This is the universal headship in three aspects. This is not a very interesting or exciting point, but it is something very solid, which we cannot skip over. Here the headship of Christ over every man is concerning individuals. Christ is the Head both corporately of the Body, the church, and individually of the believers. He is the Head directly of every one of us. In the divine governmental ordination, woman is under the headship of man. God created the female in this way (Gen. 2:18-24; 1 Tim. 2:13). According to the nature (1 Cor. 11:14) created by God, woman is subordinate to man. Paul also says in verse 3 that the head of Christ is God. Christ is God's anointed One, appointed by God. Hence, He is under God, and God as the Originator is His Head. This refers to the relationship between Christ and God in the divine government.

The Lord's Supper

Following the universal headship, Paul comes to the Lord's supper in 11:17-34. The emphasis of the table of the Lord is the fellowship of His blood and of His body (10:16-17), the participation in the Lord, the enjoyment of the Lord in mutuality, in fellowship; however, the stress of the Lord's supper is the remembrance of the Lord (11:24-25). At the Lord's table we receive His body and blood for our enjoyment; at the Lord's supper we give Him our remembrance for His enjoyment.

The real remembrance of the Lord is to eat the bread and drink the cup (v. 26), that is, to participate in, to enjoy, the Lord who has given Himself to us through His redeeming death. To eat the bread and drink the cup is to take in the redeeming Lord as our portion, as our life and blessing. This is to remember Him in a genuine way.

The thought of the apostle in using this expression *the body* (v. 29), not *the body of the Lord*, may imply the mystical Body of Christ (Eph. 4:4) in addition to the physical body of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:24). In taking the Lord's supper we need to discern the Lord's Body. Therefore, when we participate in the Lord's table, we must discern whether the bread on the table signifies the one Body of Christ or any division of man (any denomination). In discerning the Body of Christ we should not partake of the bread in any division or with any divisive spirit. Our participation in the Lord's table must be the unique fellowship of His unique Body without any division either in practice or in spirit.

The Divine Trinity in the Divine Operations, Ministries, and Gifts

Chapter 12 is mainly on the Divine Trinity in the divine operations, ministries, and

gifts. These three are the Trinity in expression, not the Trinity in existence. Verses 4 through 6 say, “There are distinctions of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are distinctions of ministries, yet the same Lord; and there are distinctions of operations, but the same God, who operates all things in all.” The gifts are by the Spirit; the ministries, the services, are for the Lord; and the operations are of God. Here the Triune God is involved in these three things—gifts, ministries, and operations. The gifts by the Spirit are to carry out the ministries, the services, for the Lord, and the ministries for the Lord are to accomplish the operations, the works, of God. This is the Triune God moving in the believers for the accomplishment of His eternal purpose to build up the church, the Body of Christ, for the expression of God.

The Manifestation of the Spirit

First Corinthians 12:7 says, “To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for what is profitable.” The manifestation of the Spirit is unique but has a number of aspects. The apostle lists here only nine items of the Spirit’s manifestation (vv. 8-10) as an illustration. Of these nine, speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues are listed as the last two, because they are not as profitable as the other items for the building up of the church (14:2-6, 18-19). Of these nine gifts and those listed in 12:28-30, prophecy as prediction, faith, gifts of healing, works of power, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues are miraculous. All the rest—a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, and speaking for God and speaking forth God in prophecy by the prophets, discerning of spirits, helps, and administrations—are gifts developed by the growth in life as those listed in Romans 12:6 through 8. The miraculous gifts, especially speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues, do not require any growth in life. The Corinthians did much speaking in tongues, yet they still remained in infancy (1 Cor. 3:1-3). However, the gifts developed in life require growth in life, even maturity, for the building up of the church. It was for this purpose that this Epistle was written to the Corinthians.

The Formation and Constitution of the Body

First Corinthians 12:12 and 13 say, “Even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ. For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit.” The Body has been formed by the baptism in the one Spirit. In one Spirit we have all been baptized into one Body. The baptism into the one Body has positioned us all to drink, and by drinking of the Spirit we are constituted to be the Body.

Mutuality in Speaking for the Church Meetings

The crucial point in chapter 14 is mutuality in speaking for the church meetings. The church meeting is by mutuality in speaking, and speaking is mainly prophesying (vv. 4, 19, 26). The primary denotation of the word *prophesy* in chapter 14 is not to predict but to speak a particular word concerning Christ. To prophesy is to speak Christ, to speak forth Christ, and to speak for Christ. This kind of speaking builds up not only the individual saints but also the church (vv. 3-4).

Christ Becoming the Life-giving Spirit through Resurrection

The crucial point in chapter 15 is Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit through resurrection (v. 45). Resurrection was not merely an objective act accomplished by Christ. It is very much related to us subjectively. Incarnation was much more than an objective fact; it was a process that brought God into humanity. The principle is the same with the process of resurrection. Resurrection was not merely an act in itself; it was

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a process to bring forth the life-giving Spirit. Through the process of resurrection, the man, the last Adam, who ended the old creation, became the life-giving Spirit, the germinating element of the new creation.

First Corinthians unveils that the very Christ, who is the portion of all the believers and into whose fellowship we all have been called, is all-inclusive. He is God's power and God's wisdom, as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption to us (1:24, 30). He is our glory for our glorification (2:7), hence, the Lord of glory (v. 8). He is the depths (deep things) of God (v. 10). He is the unique foundation of God's building (3:11). He is our Passover (5:7), the unleavened bread (v. 8), the spiritual food, and the spiritual rock flowing out the spiritual drink (10:3-4). He is the Head (11:3) and the Body (12:12). He is the firstfruits (15:20, 23), the second man (v. 47), and the last Adam (v. 45); and as such, He became the life-giving Spirit (v. 45). The life-giving Spirit is the totality of all the other foregoing items, and we have to experience this life-giving Spirit in our spirit.

"My Spirit and Yours"

A number of things are covered in chapter 16, but the crucial point is in verse 18: "They refreshed my spirit and yours. Acknowledge therefore such ones." After the foregoing sixteen chapters Paul concludes his Epistle with this expression. Some of the saints who came to Paul refreshed his spirit and the Corinthians' spirit. This indicates that all the items in this first book to the Corinthians should be experiences in our spirit, because such an expression indicates that the writer is a person living, acting, and working in the spirit. He expects that his recipients, the Corinthians, would be such persons in the spirit also. This is the conclusion of this book. The verse is very short, but the point in it is very crucial. In chapter 15 there is the life-giving Spirit, and in chapter 16 there is our spirit so that we may experience Christ in such a rich way as our portion. Then the fact that Christ is ours becomes our reality. **AFC**

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The Deeper Meaning of Fellowship in 1 Corinthians

This word *fellowship* is profound and very deep...*Fellowship* does not merely mean that there is communication between you and someone else; it also denotes participation in that one. Furthermore, it means that we and Christ have become one. It also means that we enjoy Christ and all He is, and that He enjoys us and what we are. As a result, there is not only a mutual communication but a mutuality in every way. All that Christ is becomes ours, and all that we are becomes His. We all have been called by God into such a mutuality between us and the Son of God. I do not believe that in any other language there is an adequate equivalent for the Greek word for *fellowship*. We have been called into the fellowship of God's Son. We have been called into a mutuality in which we enjoy what the Son of God is, and in which we are one with Him and He is one with us. Elsewhere in this Epistle, in 6:17, Paul says, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." We have been called into such a oneness. In this oneness we enjoy what Christ is, and He enjoys what we are.

Even though we are so pitiful, Christ still enjoys us...You may say, "I certainly believe that we have been called to enjoy Christ. But how can it be true that Christ enjoys us? You may say that this is true, but I find it hard to believe." Christ, however, would say, "Child, I enjoy you very much. You don't realize how much I enjoy you. Even when you are weak and low, I still enjoy you, for I am one spirit with you."

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