

Scripture Truth



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Let us make man
How to live for God

Speaking in the assembly
"Behold, I am coming quickly"
Christ in the midst of the church

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“Behold, I am coming quickly”

Should it be “quickly”, or “soon” – as favoured by many modern versions? The word plainly has the sense of speed of action in the New Testament outside the book of Revelation (Matthew 5:25; 28:7,8; Mark 16:8; John 11:29; the only doubtful case being Mark 9:39). The foremost NT Greek-English lexicon prefers “without delay, quickly, at once” insofar as these are distinguishable from “soon”.

Note also the present, not the future, tense in all the occurrences of the phrase in Revelation (2:5, 16: 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, 20). The Lord’s coming is so imminent that it is as if He were already on the way!

The “I am coming quickly” in 2:5 is to remove the “lampstand”, or testimony, of the church in Ephesus. It means that if they do not repent this will happen “suddenly”, “without warning”. Similarly with 2:16.

But do Revelation chapters 6 – 20 really teach the imminence of our meeting with the Lord? The only saints who are stated to be raised at the time of the Lord’s premillennial coming are tribulation martyrs (20:4, 5). If this means that the rest of us will have to wait a thousand years plus to meet the Lord, this could scarcely be described as “coming quickly” as far as we are concerned! Yet the Lord said, “I am coming quickly”.

Therefore the “coming quickly” must refer to something not described in these chapters. However it is certainly implied in the mention of those who come *with* Christ at His judgmental appearing (17:14; 19:14). He must have come *for* them before they can come *with* Him. The rapture is also surely promised in 3:10-11; and I take 16:15 to be a parenthetical warning to the readers not to let the long description of “things to come” since chapter 6 make them think that the Lord will delay His coming *for* them. (If verse 15 were addressed to the people undergoing the “bowls” judgments, the warning would signal to the readers that the Lord was not “coming quickly” for *them*.)

“I am coming quickly is” a word for us. Our lives should be controlled by this word – that’s just what the Lord Himself also said (Luke 12:37-40). “This world is not our home”, and is becoming ever less home-like. Our response should be, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20). But is it?

THEO BALDERSTON

Genesis 1

The divisions of creation: 1:1-13

F.B. Hole

Back to basics, with the ever-insightful comments of the third editor of this magazine.

The first book of the Bible has a place of very great importance in the whole scheme of God-given truth which the Book brings to us. This may be stated with special emphasis in regard to its opening chapters, for in them is revealed to us the origin of the visible creation that surrounds us, together with the true account of how have come to pass the conditions of sin and sorrow and toil and pain and disease and death, which fill the earth today. If we fall into untruth and delusion as to these things, we shall be deluded as to all things. If we are in doubt as to them, we shall be in doubt as to all else that is revealed.

Genesis 1 puts on record facts which preceded the appearance of man on the earth, and which therefore cannot have been derived from any kind of historical record. If its statements are not the record in writing of a revelation from God to man, they can only be the guesses and brainy concoctions of men who lived some four thousand years ago. Such guesses were of course plentiful enough in the ancient world, and some of them have come down to us, grotesque in their deformity. We need not waste our time over them, or even mention them, save that they serve to throw into relief the calm certainty and sanity of the God-given record of Genesis 1.

The first four words of our English Bibles, “In the beginning God”, present to us the primordial germ from which springs all that is revealed to us in the entire book. Here is the great fact that comprehends every other fact within its all-embracing sweep. The Bible begins with God and not man, and we must do the same. If we begin with man rather than God confusion will reign in all our thoughts. In the Scriptures it is both assumed and stated that God exists and that He originated all things. Unbelieving men may demand that proofs of His existence be produced, but nowhere in Scripture does God condescend to furnish such proofs. Were He to do so they would not be intelligible to the feeble minds of puny men. Moreover they are no more really needed than

“In the beginning God”: The Bible begins with God and not man, and we must do the same.

proofs that the sun exists and shines. That fact could only be doubted by a man who had neither sight nor feeling, and it is just because unbelieving men have neither sight nor feeling of a spiritual sort, that they doubt, or even deny, the existence of God.

The heavenly bodies above us and the earth beneath our feet are realities too plain to be missed, even by the most unthinking and degraded of men. What are they? Where did they come from? Have they always existed? The first verse supplies the answer. They are not eternal, but had a beginning. Both heavens and earth came into being by the creative act of the eternal God. Three times in the chapter do we read, “God created,” and five times another verb is used, meaning “to make”. “To make” is to fashion out of existing matter, whereas when we read of God “creating”, then “through faith we understand... that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Hebrews 11:3, KJV).

Another thing also confronts us in this first verse, though not apparent in our English Bibles. The Hebrew word for “God” is *Elohim*, a plural word, whereas the verb “created” is in the singular. This is the more remarkable in that Hebrew nouns can assume a dual form, meaning exactly two. Hence the plural form must mean three, or more. Reading this in the light of the New Testament we at once see the *Trinity in Unity*. That great revelation of the Godhead is not explicitly stated, but the words, given by inspiration of God, are so framed as to be wholly consistent with it when it is stated.

To sum up: Genesis 1:1 gives us the original creative act of God by which the whole material and visible universe came into being, long before such things as “days and years” (verse 14), were known. Its epoch may have been inconceivably remote,¹ but we firmly believe that His work was perfect in its season. In the New Testament, as we know, this creative act is attributed to the Word and the Son, for creation was left in His hands (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2), as also was redemption, and as judgment will be (John 5:26-27).

In verse 2 we move from that remote epoch to a time much nearer our own, and we descend, as regards this earth, to a state of very great imperfection. It is found “without form” – that is, a ruin, a waste; it is also “void,” i.e., empty. Isaiah 45:18 plainly says, “He created it not in vain, He formed it to be inhabited.” This is very striking, for here again the proper word for creating is

¹ The doctrine of so-called “Christian catastrophism”, *alias* “the gap theory”, was held by most godly, Bible-believing Bible teachers until the mid-twentieth century, but is perhaps less readily aligned with, e.g., Exodus 20: 11 than the view that sees no “gap” between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. [Ed.]

used, as in Genesis 1:1; and “in vain” is a translation of the same word as “without form” in our verse. So we have a definite confirmation of the thought that the state of the earth as in verse 2 was one that supervened long after the original creation, as the result of some catastrophic event which is not revealed to us. Besides the ruin and the emptiness there was also darkness, not everywhere, but “on the face of the deep”. It looks as if at this stage the earth was covered with water, the face of which was swathed in darkness. God is light, and elsewhere in the universe light was shining, but something hindered light from reaching the earth. In this condition of things the Spirit of God acted. We believe it was Herbert Spencer, an atheist philosopher, who said that, to account for things visible, five things must be predicated: viz., time, space, matter, force, motion. All five appear in our chapter. The Spirit of God is indeed Force, and He moved on the face of this watery matter.

But not apart from the Word of God. It is remarkable how in the New Testament the Spirit and the word are brought together, and specially so in connection with the new birth – see John 3:5,6, and 1 Peter 1:23. Hence we cannot but see a striking analogy between God’s work here in things material and His even greater work in things spiritual. When our spiritual condition was one of ruin and emptiness and darkness, light shined into our hearts by the moving of the Spirit of God and the power of the word of God. The first word recorded as proceeding from the mouth of God is “Light,” for we understand that “Let there be light” is more literally, “Light be!”

Note the words, “And God said.” As we travel through the chapter we shall find they occur ten times. “The worlds were framed by the word of God,” as Hebrews 11: 3 has told us; or we may adopt the words of Psalm 33: 9, “He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.” How significant in this connection is the opening of John’s Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word;” that is, He was pre-existent to the first beginnings of creation. Moreover He “was with God, and ... was God ... All things were made by Him.” So it was the Word who later “was made flesh, and dwelt among us” that uttered the words of power that created and made all things. Hence creation contains a very definite word as to the power and wisdom and glory of God, though the revelation falls far short of that which reached us when the Word became flesh.

*“He spake, and it was done;
He commanded, and it stood fast.”*

*Six times the words, "And God said,"
have the sequel, "and it was so."
The word of God is never failing of its effect.*

Notice another thing. Six times in the chapter the words, "And God said," have the appropriate sequel, "and it was so." The word of God is seen at the very outset to be powerful, never failing of its effect. How encouraging to be assured of this fact in the first chapter of the Bible, for we may be sure it applies to every word that God has spoken. When the end of the story is reached we shall be able to say with triumph, "and it was so," in regard to every promise He has made, every prediction He has uttered. As the result of God's first utterance light shone upon the face of the deep, and God saw that it was good. This indeed it must be, since "God is light."

In darkness unrealities may deceive us because realities are obscured, and that is not good. To have everything brought into manifestation is good indeed. So God divided the light from the darkness. There was not to be a compromise, a mixture, a sort of indefinite twilight, but the darkness was for a season to give way completely to light, and thus there was a division between them. Hence there was evening and there was morning – a first day. For a long time great exception was taken by unbelievers to this statement of verse 5, because the sun does not appear until the fourth day. But the sun is not the only source of light.

The question is raised as to whether the days of Genesis 1 are to be understood in a literal sense, or figuratively as indicating immense periods of time; and it has provoked much discussion, as neither interpretation of the word is free from difficulties. For ourselves, we believe it is to be understood literally. The figurative sense occurs in Scripture – e.g., "the day of salvation", "the day of His power" (2 Corinthians 6:1; Psalm 110:3). But this sense is most evidently a secondary one and the literal sense is the primary. In our judgment this fact alone is pretty decisive. We must have the primary meaning established before we can arrive at any secondary meaning at all, and Genesis 1 deals with primary things. The repetition of "the evening and the morning..." fits in with the primary meaning, and would have very little meaning in the secondary sense. Further, in verse 16, where the sun is made to rule the day and the moon to rule the night, we do not see how the primary sense can be avoided. That these mighty works should be accomplished with extreme rapidity presents no difficulty to faith. Mighty works, though of another order, were done instantaneously by the Word, when He became flesh and took "the form of a

servant.” He was “in the form of God” when He acted in creation, and everything displayed His unqualified omnipotence. But we must carefully bear in mind that after verse 1 the verb “create” does not occur again till we come to verse 21. In between we have “God made”, an expression which indicates His action in forming or re-forming already existing matter. In the days of Genesis 1 God was dealing with the earth that had been in a state of chaos, putting it into order with a view to the creation of man.

On the second day a “firmament” or “expanse,” was called into being. As a result of this a further division took place; not now of light from darkness but of waters from waters. God called this expanse, heaven. In verse 1 “the heaven” indicates what we should call the stellar heavens. In verse 8 the atmospheric heavens are indicated. There it is that immense quantities of water float above in the form of clouds, divided from the far greater quantities that lie on the earth beneath. As the result of the work of the second day the earth was surrounded with an atmosphere. It was accomplished by His word, “God said... and it was so”.

Again on the third day there was division. The waters above the expanse were not affected, but those beneath were gathered together into one place, and this permitted dry land to appear. In result that which was stable and fixed appeared, where previously all had been unstable and in motion. Other things followed before the third day closed, but this was the essential preliminary.

We have now had five things before us, the naming of which came from the lips of God. We observe this because in the next chapter we find God bringing to Adam the living creatures that He had made on the fifth and sixth days, that he might give them names, and in keeping with this the vast variety of creatures indicated in 1:20-25 are only mentioned generically. (The word “whales” in verse 21 [KJV] might seem to be an exception, but the word so translated only means “sea monsters.”) So, though Adam was permitted to display his powers of discernment in many a minor detail, these five things he had to accept as named by God – Day, Night Heaven, Earth, Seas.

As before in the division between light and darkness, so now in the division between earth and seas, we get the remark, “God saw that it was good” (verses 10, 18). There are divisions that are *good* because Divinely made. It is only man-made divisions that are evil. The third day did not close before the newly revealed earth had brought forth grass and seed-producing herbs and fruit-producing trees. Here we note another step forward in the work of making the earth a fit habitation for man. Vegetable life is perhaps the lowest form of life that is known to us... Yet God saw that even this lowest form of life was good.

~
No species ever has developed into another species

~ ~ ~
Every creature reproduces itself after its kind
~

Here for the first time we meet with the idea of variety and of species, and consequently for the first time we meet with the significant words, “after his kind.” They occur no less than ten times in this chapter, and always in connection with the appearance of some form of life, which had within itself power of reproduction. Here at the outset then is stated most emphatically a great law that is binding on all animate creation. However great and many the varieties which may occur, or be induced, within a species, there is no development into another species. No idea has been more diligently propagated by unbelievers during the last century than that of evolution, and though Darwin’s theories as to how evolution can have been brought about have been, we understand, largely abandoned,² yet the idea itself is still clung to as affording an alternative to the disliked truth of creation.

In Genesis 1, due to Divine foreknowledge we have this ten-times-repeated fact, which flatly denies evolution, and in practice it is continually verified. No species ever has developed into another species. Every creature reproduces itself after its kind, and never into another kind. Adam in his fallen condition and all his race are bound by this law. No fallen sinner can evolve into a child of God. Our only hope lies in a new creation, and this is what we have in Christ, as becomes manifest when we turn to the New Testament. The “man in Christ” is a man of an entirely new order. Such is the work of God by His Spirit and through the gospel.

From Scripture Truth, 36 (1948-50), pp. 11 – 16, language slightly updated.

² Perhaps referring to controversy among evolutionists over the mechanism of evolution, which was effectively ended by the rise of so-called neo-Darwinism in the early decades of the twentieth century. [Ed.]

Let us make man

Donald Davison

Permitted eavesdropping on Divine conversations.

In a few places in the Scriptures we are given the privilege of an insight into conversations within the Godhead in eternity – before time or creation. This is stupendous. It causes us to bow our hearts in reverence and worship to think that the Persons of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, would desire to share with us through the Scriptures some of their eternal deliberations that will eventually culminate in a universe filled eternally to the glory of God in a scene where “sin, nor want, nor woe, nor death” can ever come.

There are three Scriptures amongst others that I would bring before us, and in considering them we may indeed find themes to occupy our hearts in intelligent worship, praise, and affection to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first of these thoughts forms the title of this article and is found in Genesis 1:26. It was surely in eternity, before ever the world was, that these words were uttered. Did they have only man and mankind in thought and prospect? Or was there some other Man in the divine mind, and expressed in this divine exclamation, who would be for the glory of God, and would meet and satisfy the desires and needs of the heart of the Godhead eternally? We know the answer. We know that sin did not take God by surprise. But that ever from eternity God had before Him a Man, His heart’s delight, who would glorify, magnify, God Himself, and bring about a scene of perfect holiness and perfect righteousness, based upon the solid foundation of the death of that same one – Christ; a scene that will never diminish or alter in its perfection, but rather will subsist for eternity in the divine atmosphere of eternal love.

We may deduce from Genesis 1:26 & 27 that God, from eternity, has ever desired to company and dwell with men. Having, as the great Potter, formed man of the dust of the ground, He placed him in the garden. Then, subsequently, He said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Genesis 2:18, KJV). God was going to form for him a counterpart, one suited to reign and rule over created things with (i.e., alongside) him. He caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and, as we know,

*From eternity God had before Him
a Man who would glorify Him*

from his side He built a woman and brought her to the man (verses 21-23). This, as we know, is a beautiful picture of the church springing from the side of our Saviour on the cross; and as Eve was brought to him Adam was able to say, “This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” Eve, builded, brought, and given to Adam in perfection before sin ever entered the world, is a wonderful picture of Christ and the church.



A second Scripture in which we are given the privilege of an insight into conversations within the Godhead in eternity is found in Proverbs 8:23-31. Here, too, we are allowed again to listen to a Divine Person (doubtless our Lord Jesus Christ) uttering a soliloquy concerning a time before ever there was the beginning of all that ever had a beginning (verse 23). This is the same beginning as is indicated in John 1:1; and in that eternal “beginning”, before any of God’s creatorial works were done, He, who in His own Person is wisdom, was already there.

In the verses following verse 23 this One speaks of Jehovah’s works of old, and of the thoughts, purpose, and intention of God in creating all that has ever been created. These verses defy all adequate exposition, yet are given for our encouragement, adoration, and spiritual growth in the eternal things of God as we contemplate them. They speak of things terrestrial and celestial (verses 22-23), geological and mineralogical (verses 25-26), astronomical, meteorological, oceanographical, and hydrological (verses 27-28). But it is not the created things that are the most blessed substance of what is written in this passage and the object of it. It is the Persons in verses 30-31 that are its real object. As we have already seen, verse 23 speaks of a “beginning”. Verses 30-31 tell us firstly of the relationship to God of the One who was by His side in the creation of all things – with the very pregnant word, “Then”. What does this mean? At that “time”, before time was, “I was by him, as one brought up with him (“the nursling of his love”, Darby Trans., footnote): and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth.” Here is One who was ever and always the “delight” of the heart of God.

Is there more? Yes. We also find out the object for which the creation was created, the conclusion to which the work of creation tended: it is in the little phrase, “and my delights were with the sons of men.” The One who is eternally the delight of the heart of God, has others – you and me – who are the delight and joy of *His* heart.

Here are unfolded some of the innermost secrets of the heart of the Persons of the Godhead from all eternity. We today are the recipients of the nearest and

*We today are the recipients of
the nearest love of the heart of Christ*

dearest love of the heart of Christ, and, as forming part of His church, His body, are in the nearest and dearest relationship to Him. And, when in glory, we shall be His bride, for the joy and satisfaction of His heart for all eternity.



A third Scripture giving us the privilege of an insight into conversations within the Godhead in eternity is the wonderful passage in Psalm 40:6-10. How privileged are we to be allowed within earshot of some of the divine and eternal speaking and thoughts of God, hidden from unregenerate men, but now disclosed to us in the power of the Holy Spirit!

Verse 6 takes account of the four major offerings in the Old Testament, though in a different order from that set out in Leviticus 1 – 4. “Sacrifice” denotes the peace offering; “offering”, or “oblation” the meal offering; whilst the burnt offering and sin offering are mentioned in so many words. The burnt offering, as we know, was “fully for God” (Leviticus 1:9); and therefore this psalm has been spoken of as “the psalm of the burnt offering”.

Verses 7 and 8 must be understood against the implied background of the shortcomings of Israel and utter failure of man in general to please God. Against this background we listen with awe and amazement to the words, “Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume [or, “roll”] of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God.” Here the Son speaks to the Father, before the world was, of (if we may so express it) His eternal resolve to come into the world to do the God’s will, in contrast to every man and woman who had ever lived or ever would live. Pure prophecy perfectly fulfilled at the in-coming of the Lord into the world and in His flawless life here! I am sure we all admit that these verses need to be read and weighed carefully “in the sanctuary” in order to begin to enter into some of the wonder, greatness, and glory of what “coming into the world” meant for Him.

In Hebrews 10:9, where these words are repeated, it is to be noted that the words “I delight” are omitted. Why? The answer is, because in that chapter the *sacrifice* of our Lord regarding the question of sin is being spoken about, and sin-bearing could never be described as a delight to the Sin-bearer. “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name” (John 12:27-28). His

offering of Himself to God for sin was why He came into the world, and by it He resolved the sin question both for the maintenance of the glory of God, and for the blessing of man; but it was never a delight.



Finally, it becomes clear that the desire of God has always been to dwell amongst men and for His saints to dwell with Him. In Genesis 3 we know that the voice of God came down to commune with Adam in the cool of the day; but sin had entered, and estrangement from God was the result that ruined this type of communion forever. In Exodus we find the desire of God expressed with the words, “Let them make me a sanctuary [a holy, set-apart place] that I may dwell among them” (25:8). This they did, only to fail through unbelief even with the presence of God in their midst. The tabernacle gives place to the temple of magnificence, with its ultimate and inevitable failure again. So matters remained until the incarnation, as described in the beautiful words, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt [resided, encamped] among us” (John.1:14). But even this resulted in the rejection and crucifixion of the Lord of glory. This brings into relief the reason for the incarnation of the Son – because if He had not been God (Romans 9:5) He could never have offered a perfect sacrifice for sin. If He had not been man both able and willing to die, He could never have vicariously become our Redeemer and Saviour. It is most interesting that the word for “dwell” in Exodus comes from a Hebrews root (*shakan*), and that even the Greek word for “dwelt” in John 1:14 might well have been selected by the Holy Spirit for its affinity with this word. *Shakan* leads us ultimately to the “Shekinah” glory – the dwelling, with its glory, of God among His people.

But what of the future? Two Scriptures come to mind, the first in just six words in the prayer of our Lord in John 17:24. “Father I will that they also whom thou hast given me **be with me**, [the earnest desire of love] **where I am** [our eternal destiny]”. In result we find in Revelation 21:1-5 these words about eternity: “Behold the tabernacle [the eternal dwelling place] of God is with men, and He will dwell with them and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, their God” – eternally!

May our hearts be encouraged by these words as we wait for Him to come again.

“The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us”. But even this resulted in the rejection of the Lord of glory.

How to live for God

Galatians 5

Gordon Hughes

This lucid, inspiring article originated as a Truth for Today talk on Premier Radio. See <https://www.truth4today.org.uk/>.

A well-known Christian gentleman of past times was once wandering through the slave market. His eye fell on a likely looking slave. He bought him. The slave, knowing his new owner to be a Christian, looked on him with contempt. "I would have thought you would be the last person to buy me as a slave," he sneered. "But I've bought you to set you free," the Christian answered. "Sir," the slave replied in wonder, "I'll serve you forever!"

It would be unimaginable to think that that slave would ever again put himself under the bondage of another master. Yet Paul's letter to the Galatians is addressed to Christians who, through the redemptive work of Christ at Calvary, had been set free from slavery – slavery to sin and slavery to Moses' Law – but were now going back to that Law for salvation.

In chapter 5 of this letter we turn from the doctrinal, or teaching, part of Paul's letter to the practical consequences of this teaching. This is a pattern followed by Paul in most of his epistles. First of all, God teaches us what He has done for us in Christ. Then, and only then, does God show us the kind of people He wants us to be as new creatures in Christ.

It will be convenient today to deal with our chapter in five bite-sized portions, if you'll allow the expression.

Born free – verses 1-6

Verse 1 sums up the whole message of this epistle. Let's listen to its clarion call: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (NKJV).

Born Free is, of course, the title of the well-known book and film which tell the story of Elsa, the lioness. As an abandoned cub, Elsa was brought up by Joy Adamson and her husband. But the day came when Joy realised that Elsa could no longer go on living in her captive environment. She had been born free. Her

*"Stand fast therefore in the liberty
by which Christ has made us free."*

destiny was to live her life in the wild – a free lioness. At considerable heartache to themselves, Joy and her husband began to prepare Elsa for her liberty. Eventually she was successfully released into the wild – born free and living free.

By the grace of God, not because we deserved it, we too have been set free – free from the penalty of sin, free from the power of sin and, in a day to come, free from the very presence of sin itself. The Galatian Christians had believed this, but now some were telling them that to be a proper Christian, they needed something more than Christ’s work at Calvary – they needed to keep the Law of Moses, and, as a sign that they were under that Law, to be circumcised. So Paul warns them in verse 2, “If you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.” What solemn words! All those sufferings of Christ at Calvary, all His abandonment on the cross – all for nothing? God forbid!

We need today to heed this same warning. Never let me think that I need anything for my salvation, for peace with God, other than that which the Lord Jesus has already done at Calvary. Never let me say that to be a Christian, I need “Christ and...” – whatever that extra might be. Of course, as we shall see as we move down this chapter, there are features which should be seen in my life as a Christian. But these are “things that accompany salvation”, as Hebrews 6:9 tells us. They can never be the basis of my salvation.

Keeping the Law can never be the basis of that salvation. That Law stands as a monument to man’s inability to keep it. The person under the Law “is a debtor to keep the whole law,” Paul warns in Galatians 5:3. No amount of obedience can make up for one act of disobedience.

It is noteworthy that when, in Acts 15, the early church in Jerusalem met together to consider the relationship of the Christian to Moses’ Law, they described that Law as “a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear” (v.10). They went on to add, “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved.” Christian, in Christ you have been born free! Don’t go back to slavery! Remember Jesus’ promise, “If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

*Never say that
to be a Christian, I need “Christ and...”*

You ran well – verses 7-12

Verse 7 is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. Here it is in the *New International Version*: “You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?” Sadly, in the Bible we come across many who began so well, and then made shipwreck of the life of faith. King Saul, the first king of Israel, began well, but ended his days confessing, “I have played the fool” (1 Samuel 26:21, NKJV). King Solomon was another who began so well but ended with his great wealth and his many wives turning his heart away from God.

The Galatian Christians had begun so well. So great was their joy when Paul first brought them the good news of the gospel that Paul could write, “...You would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me” (4:15). But now, because of these false teachers of the Law, they were in danger of being diverted off the path of true Christian faith. Someone or something had “cut in on them” to keep them from “obeying the truth”.

In their case it was the Law-teachers. But, Christian reader, if Paul were writing to you or to me today, would he have to say, “You ran well?” Once you followed Christ so well, but now you’ve wandered away from Him. Has someone, or something, “cut in” on your life to turn you away from Christ? For the sinner, but also for the saint of God, the words of the chorus are still true:

“There’s a way back to God from the dark paths of sin.
There’s a door that is open, and you may go in:
at Calvary’s cross is where you begin...”

For, if the Bible shows us those who began well and ended so badly, it also shows those who began badly but ended so well. Peter, who denied his Master with oaths and curses, yet in true repentance was restored to that same Master. So much so that, only a few weeks later, Peter preached and over three thousand were saved (see Acts 2). John Mark gave up as one of Paul’s companions on Paul’s first missionary journey. Yet just before Paul was martyred, he could write, “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11). To that failed servant Mark, God entrusted the writing of the Gospel of Mark, the Good News of God’s perfect Servant.

In the Bible we come across many who began well, and then made shipwreck of the life of faith

Trusting Jesus and... (whatever that “and” might be) can begin in a small way, but the results are catastrophic. So Paul writes, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Galatians 5:9). Bread-making depends on the fact that a little yeast (i.e., leaven) added to dough, will gradually work its way throughout the whole lump of dough. In the Bible, leaven / yeast is always a picture of evil, insidiously working away and corrupting everything it contacts. It is interesting that Paul addresses these identical words to the Corinthian Christians (1 Corinthians 5:6). At Corinth, it was moral evil, wicked living, which was doing its evil work in the Corinthian church. Here it is doctrinal evil, false teaching, which is doing its evil work.

In verse 11 Paul writes about “the offence of the cross”. The Greek word translated “offence” is the word from which we get our word “scandal” – the scandal of the cross. It adds respectability to the flesh, to the natural “me”, to think that there are things which I can add to the cross of Christ to merit my salvation. The “scandal of the cross” cuts right across any such thinking. The cross stands as the witness of man’s total inability to save himself, and of God’s great love in meeting man’s need in the death of His Son.

Liberty not licence – verses 13-18.

In verse 13 Paul takes up again the call to liberty which he had sounded in the opening verse, but goes on to point out the responsibilities of that liberty: “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Sadly, there are many today who, in pursuit of liberty, have given themselves up to a ceaseless round of pleasure, of sex and drugs, only to find that their supposed liberty is bitter bondage. Christian liberty is not licence to sin, but rather the freedom to love and to serve. It is the liberty to be the person God wants me to be and not a slave of sin. It is the liberty Jesus knew when, on that night before His death, He said to His disciples, “I am among you as the One who serves” (Luke 22:27). “Whose service is perfect freedom”, says a well-known prayer.

That liberty to be the person God wants me to be can only be worked out in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. So Paul continues, “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (verse 16). Walking is one of man’s earliest and distinctive activities. Consequently, it is used in the Bible as a symbol of man’s activities. It is noteworthy that in this epistle to the Galatians

Christian liberty is the liberty Jesus knew when He said, “I am among you as the One who serves.”

there are probably more references per page to the Holy Spirit than in any other book of the New Testament. It is not difficult to see the reason for this. Paul is at great pains to point out to these Galatian Christians that the Christian life is not produced by the external force of the Law, but rather by the internal power of the Holy Spirit. As we shall discover in verse 22, it is significant that the first fruit of the Spirit listed there is love. Christian liberty is to be expressed through love – firstly, love for God and then for one another. We began by thinking about the slave who had been bought by his master to be set free. His response of love to his new master was, “Sir, I’ll serve you forever”. May that also be our response to our heavenly Master!

The natural man – verses 19-21

In what is described in the verses before us here, it’s only too sadly obvious that man is at work, the natural man, sinful man. Let’s listen to the sorry catalogue: “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions...” Do we need to go on? What an apt picture of life in the 1st century AD – and in our 21st century! Paul solemnly adds, “Those who practise such things will not inherit the kingdom of God”. As Christians, none of us is immune from slipping into any of these sins, for we all have this natural man within us. But through the death of Christ, we have been delivered from the bondage to sin, from the habitual practice of these things. We have been given a new nature, eternal life, the very life of God, which expresses itself in the power of God’s indwelling Holy Spirit.

The new man – verses 22-26

And so we can turn thankfully from this sordid list to the kind of life lived in the power of the Spirit, the new man. What a happy picture it is! Paul writes, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such, there is no law”. Human work habitually generates noise and disturbance. Think of road works! By contrast, if you were to go into an orchard on a sunny summer’s day, you might think nothing was happening, nobody was at work. Apart from the buzzing of the bees, all is quiet. But much is happening! Fruit, springing out of life, is growing. So the Spirit of God quietly working away in the Christian would produce fruit for God.

*“If we live in the Spirit,
let us also walk in the Spirit”*

There isn't space to go into the details of these two lovely verses. We should just notice that the fruit is one, but revealed in these nine lovely facets, each of which should be seen in the life of every Christian. They are all seen perfectly in the life of Christ. The first three – love, joy, peace – display fruit Godward, although, as we have already noted, true love for God must show itself in love for one another. The next three – longsuffering, kindness, goodness – are manward. The last three – faithfulness, gentleness, self-control – are self-ward. Life lived in this way will be wholly acceptable to God. His Law will have nothing to say against it.

So Paul continues, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (verse 25). It is interesting that the word used here for “walk” is different from the general word used in verse 16. Here it carries the force of “keep in step with the Spirit”. Here's an army of soldiers on the march. “Left, right, left, right”, the call goes out. But one of the soldiers, with his eyes on the captain in front, notices that he is out of step. So with a quick hop, he rapidly gets himself back into step again. So Hebrews 12:2 invites us – “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith”. It is as we do this, that the Holy Spirit of God will be able to show us where we are out of step with our Saviour. Only in this way, will we grow like Jesus and be able to bring forth this lovely fruit for God and for one another. May it be so, for His Name's sake!

~

*“Looking unto Jesus,
the author and finisher of our faith”.*

~ ~ ~

*As we do this,
the Holy Spirit will show us
where we are out of step with our Saviour.*

~

Christ in the midst of the church

Part I

G. E. Stevens

One of those New-Testament verses we all think we know – but do we?

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20, KJV)

Introduction

Just prior to the well-known Scripture cited above, the Lord Jesus states: “Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven” (v.18). The context of this pronouncement is one of assembly discipline (see verse 17), and (without getting too deeply into this subject) we can see the Lord is referring to a united agreement on the part of the disciples which is paralleled by the action of heaven. The agreement is important, but so also is the fact that the thing is done in the name of the Lord (compare 1 Corinthians 5:4).

Hence, the concept of agreement on earth finding its answer in heaven applies to prayer also, because the Lord goes on to say: “Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on the earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven.” He then goes on to show that He Himself is to be the central “hub” of their meeting and their agreements: “For where two or three are gathered together unto My name, there am I in the midst of them.”

So, whether meeting to agree about discipline, or for prayer, then the presence of the Lord Jesus Himself is guaranteed to those who meet “in His name.” Those who are gathered to His name acknowledge His authority and His grace. In a day like today when so many Christians have lost sight of the presence of the Lord when gathered together, then the carrying out of His will in discerning judgment and in praying aright may prove to be impossible. A dependence upon the Spirit of God and word of God is vital when meeting unto the Lord’s name. If this obedience and this liberty are denied, then the gathering is flawed.

Let’s have a look at the verse in more detail under the following headings:

- “Where” – the *place*.
- “two or three” – the *people*.
- “are gathered together” – the *partnership*.
- “in my name” – the *power*.
- “there am I” – the *Person* and the *presence*.
- “in the midst of them” – the *presidency* and the *promise*.

In this article I will consider the first three of these points, leaving the remainder to a later article, God willing.

“Where” – the place

The word “Where” simply shows that the Lord expects His own to meet together in a particular place. It may be in a cellar, a catacomb, a field, a barn, a house, a hall, a church – it could be almost anywhere.

When Paul wrote to Philemon, he stated: “And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in thy house...” (Philemon 2). Philemon’s home was a meeting place for Christians. The numerous Christians at Ephesus, however, would have required a larger venue. They would therefore have met in an appointed place and, although not the whole church universally, they would have represented the church of God in that city. Hence, the Lord Jesus could instruct John to write to it as the “church of Ephesus” in Revelation 2:1, “Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; these things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks...”

Today, with the *responsible* church lying in ruins, we cannot have one church in a locality as wide as a city. There are two main reasons for this: firstly, the increased number of Christians would make one church in a city impossible to function properly; and, secondly, there are so many denominations that do not hold the same Biblical principles and practices. Therefore, there are numerous meeting-places in a city in which Christians meet. These venues accommodate the Christians that make up churches in more localised communities.

“Two or three” – the people

Numbers in Scripture usually have significance. For example, in Matthew 18:16, which relates to a process of judgment, we read: “...take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.” This shows that “two” speaks of adequate witness while “three” speaks of abundant witness (cp. Deuteronomy 19:15). Meanwhile, in other Scriptures the value of “more than one” in labour, help, warmth, and conflict is highlighted (e.g. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

Furthermore, we find the number three speaks of fullness. For example, God is a Triune Being: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We call this the Godhead. All the

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is vital when meeting unto the Lord's name.*

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fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily (Colossians 2:9). In 1 John 5:8 we find the *fullness of witness*, “And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.”

Note, however, the implication of the clause “in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established”, because there must be more than this number for Scriptural discipline to be carried out. In the case of a brother trespassing against another at least four or five brethren are required to implement the judgment set out by the Lord Himself. Therefore, if a church is to function properly, more than two or three are necessary.

There are present-day problems that complicate the implementation of “Where two or three...” because, in the UK, the average Christian congregation is quite small compared to that during the early church period. Also, as we have already noted, true Biblical principles and practices are often denied in various denominations. Many tolerate *false doctrine* fundamental to the Person of Christ, to the gospel, and to the church. Others tolerate practices of immorality which are condemned by Scripture. As a result, practical fellowship is hindered.

Believers are told in regard to doctrine, “If a man therefore purge himself from these [false teachers], he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Timothy 2:21). Similarly we read in 1 Corinthians 5:11, relative to morality, “But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.” False doctrine and the practice of immorality are both condemned by Scripture.

On the other hand, in 2 Timothy 2:22 we find the positive command to “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Therefore, we are to gather with people who walk in a godly way. That means, of course, that we should be sharing the same values also. You may say, “Where am I going to find Christians who consistently live in this way?” It’s a good question because they may be few and far between. So it is vital to ask the Lord to direct your path to such people and, after a time of confirmation of doctrine and behaviour, to seek fellowship with them.

We, along with those with whom we seek fellowship, must be characterised by righteousness, faith, charity, and peace. *Righteousness* means to be right in the sight of God and to do that which is right His sight. *Faith* is to trust God and His truth implicitly. *Love* is to seek the best for the good of its object, whether towards God and His honour, or towards mankind; and *peace* is the expression of unity. We may have peace with God because we are reconciled by the blood of Christ and we may have peace with saints and men because we are trustworthy. These people also “call upon the Lord out of a pure heart”. They recognise His authority and seek to obey Him. If their hearts are “pure”, their motives will be selfless and, at the same time, they will desire to be holy – fit for the Master’s use.

“Are gathered together”- the *partnership*

Christians are not to forsake the gathering of themselves together, because they are partners in the work of God. They are “labourers together with God” as well as being God’s tillage and God’s building (1 Corinthians 3:9). It is when they are working together that they are best able to exercise their gifts and discharge their responsibilities. It is when gathered together that they are encouraged, strengthened, comforted, and built up in the faith (1 Corinthians 14:3).

It could be argued that it is certainly the responsibility of Christians to gather themselves together because they are commanded to do so (Hebrews 10:25); however, it is the Holy Spirit who draws them together. He constantly prompts the believer to obey the word of the Lord.

It was the Spirit who formed the church at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). It is through the Spirit that believing souls are added to the church (1 Corinthians 12:13). God dwells in the church as a temple by that same Spirit (Ephesians 2:22). It is the Spirit who gives a variety of gifts to the church, which are particularly demonstrated within the gatherings (1 Corinthians 12:7ff; 14:26). When these gifts are exercised in love, they encourage, comfort, and edify the believers forming the church. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is here to glorify Christ and speaks from Him. Hence, the Spirit gathers the saints where the glories of His Person and the truth concerning His work of salvation are acknowledged.

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“Christ in the midst” demands a sanctified moral condition in the believers who gather.

“Christ in the midst” demands a sanctified moral condition in the believers who gather. Hence, each one is to examine himself (1 Corinthians 11:28), keeping “short accounts with God” in regard to the sin and the associations in their life. So often believers take the “gathering to His name” for granted and forget the immensity of the privilege and responsibility of doing so.

The words “are gathered together” express fellowship one with another. Needs, whether spiritual or material, are often revealed, and through the gathering these are to be met in love. Such love is itself is a badge of discipleship (John 13:35). It also expresses the unity of that fellowship that such believers have with the Father and the Son.

To conclude this section we should recall Ephesians 4:1-4:

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.”

If the unity of the Spirit is to be kept in the “conjoining bond” of peace, then it is not only essential that believers gather together regularly, but also that they receive teaching in order that they may be of one heart and one mind in the things of God. If attendance at the church meetings is avoided, or the teaching of only certain servants is favoured, then the bond of peace may become broken.

The words “are gathered together” express fellowship one with another. Needs, spiritual or material, are often revealed, and are to be met in love.

Speaking in the assembly

The meaning of 1 Corinthians 14:34

Theo Balderston

³⁴Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says... ³⁷If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:34, 37, NKJV).

Seldom does such a sentence as verse 37 occur elsewhere in Paul’s letters. “The commandments” to which he refers are of course all his instructions in chapter 14 regarding right and edifying conduct in meetings of the assembly, especially those in verses 26-36. Of these, the instruction that immediately precedes the demand of verse 37 is the one concerning the women’s verbal participation in these meetings (vv.34-36). It would be hard not to conclude that Paul was expecting resistance to this instruction in particular, and that this expectation was a good part of the reason for his strong statement in verse 37.

This resistance is of course all around us today, and there is something in most of us that might prefer that Paul had never written verses 34-36. But there is no extant manuscript of 1 Corinthians that does not contain them. Their terminology seems perfectly plain. If we look at the lexicons, the word for “speak”, i.e., the verb *laleō*, means “to utter”, be the utterance ever so exalted and special or ever so ordinary and unimportant. It is not necessary that “speak” in 1 Corinthians 14:34 embrace every nuance that the word can bear. But there must be good grounds for the nuance that we do impute to “speak” in that verse.

And the nuance for which Paul prepared his readers in the first thirty-three verses of the chapter is extremely clear. He has already used the verb “to speak” *twenty-one times* in this very chapter. There can scarcely be another word in the Bible that is more clearly defined for us by its use in the immediate context. All these occurrences refer to types of speech that occur during meetings of the assembly. The entire chapter is about edifying speaking in assembly meetings!

There is no extant manuscript of 1 Corinthians 14 that does not contain verses 34-36.

Little as we may like it, verse 34 must mean that such speaking is not for the women of the assembly to participate in.

And of course unbelievers in general, and even many real believers, do not like it at all. It challenges modern notions of “equality” head on, which hinge on what people have the right to do. However this equating of “equality” with “right to do” does not follow in Biblical terms. Uzziah was a king (and a good one at that) but he did not have the right to offer incense in the temple (2 Chronicles 26:16ff).¹

What seems to have elicited Paul’s prohibition was the mere asking of questions (1 Corinthians 14:35). Even so, in verse 34 Paul did not merely write, “... they are not permitted to ask questions”. He did not write, “... they are not permitted to teach.” He wrote, “... they are not permitted to *speak*.” He must be supposed to have chosen the more general word deliberately. What did he mean by it? As we have seen, the first twenty-nine verses of the chapter provide an unambiguous answer. He taught that “the commandment of the Lord” did not allow the women, during meetings of the assembly, to participate in any of the “speech activities” listed in the chapter as characteristic of such meetings.

Broadly speaking, those who resist this answer divide into two groups. One group wishes to reject verse 34 in its entirety. A second group wishes to accept the verse partially, but to confine the meaning of “speak” in it to one, or at most a few “speech activities”. I shall consider the arguments of these two groups separately.

As far as I know there are three different justifications offered for entirely disregarding Paul’s demand for silence in verse 34.

(1) Some argue that verses 34-35 are not a part of the Bible at all, but rather an interpolation by a later scribe. Their basis for this claim is that in a small minority of manuscripts these two verses appear after verse 40, and not where our Bibles print them. One textual scholar argues that the only reasonable explanation for this is that they were not in Paul’s letter, and later came to be inserted at two different points. But who is to know whether one scribe, realising his eye had skipped over verses 34 and 35, might have hastily inserted them just before Paul’s subject changed to resurrection? The only answer to the enigma of the different placements of these verses is that we will never know why. The fact that they appear in every extant copy of 1st Corinthians 14 is all the proof that a Bible-believing Christian should need, to know that they indeed form part of Paul’s letter, and almost certainly should come after verse 33.

¹ I owe this analogy to Mr E. Bartlett.

(2) Others argue that in verses 34-35 Paul is quoting back to the Corinthians an excerpt from their own letter mentioned in 7:1, and that 14:36 is his horrified reaction to such a prohibition. But there is nothing about the language of the verses to suggest a different author. And, more importantly, this interpretation sets the Paul of 14:36 against the Paul of 1 Timothy 2:8-14. To hold this argument one must be a modernist, someone who denies the authenticity of 1 Timothy.

(3) The commonest class of arguments for ignoring 1 Corinthians 14:34 is that it belongs to that culture and is out of place in our culture. No doubt this point does apply to many practices recorded in the Bible. Because the Lord and the disciples reclined on couches at “the last supper” (Matthew 26:20, Darby Trans.), we are not obliged to do the same. Just because Paul exhorted the saints to greet one another with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16, etc.) we do not have to do this literally. The difference between these and other such cases, and 1 Corinthians 14:34 is that here Paul made a doctrine of it and gave a clear reason: “... but they are to be submissive.” (He gives more explicit reasons in 1 Timothy 2:13-14.)

And it is indeed the “be submissive” bit that many Christians who adopt the “cultural argument” object to.² They regard it as totally superseded by Galatians 3:28 – “neither male nor female”. How they think that Paul reconciled 1 Corinthians 14:34 with their interpretation of Galatians 3:28 is not clear to me. Probably most of them hold either opinion (1) or (2) as well.

However other Christians who are attracted to some form of “the cultural argument” feel uneasy about entirely repudiating 1 Corinthians 14:34. They argue that this injunction embodies an enduring *principle*, one which in that culture was *expressed* by the silence of women in church meetings, but in ours would be more appropriately expressed in other ways. The principle in question is of course the principle of “submission”. They argue that the word “shameful” in 14:35 denotes conduct habitual to that culture which made “silence” the proper way to express “submission” then, but not now. This argument fails on four grounds.

Firstly, they have not studied Paul’s use of the word “shameful”. In Ephesians 5:12 he uses it for something patently not considered shameful by pagan Ephesian society, otherwise Paul would not have had to forbid it.

Secondly, if the silence of women were an inappropriate expression of this principle nowadays, onlookers would either misinterpret it as expressing some other principle, or be baffled by it. In fact they make neither mistake. They

² A future article, God willing, will seek to explain the “be submissive”.

dislike the silence because they can all-too-clearly see that it is an expression of submission, a principle that they abhor. And so, far from being culturally inappropriate, the silence of women demonstrates its appropriateness by the violence of the opposition to it.

The third reason why “the cultural argument” fails is that it is not thorough enough. What, for example, about the doctrine of propitiation? The basic meaning of propitiation was clear even to pagans in that day (even if their debased resort to it misrepresented the character of God). But it simply baffles people today. Should Christianity not therefore be re-interpreting the crucifixion in other, more up-to-date terms? Christians cannot eat their cake and have it; they cannot turn the “cultural argument” on and off to suit themselves.

The fourth and main defect of this “cultural dismissal” of 1 Corinthians 14:34 is that it treats a “commandment of the Lord” (v.37) as something we have power over, something whose appropriateness we have the right to decide for ourselves.

I conclude that these three arguments for the dismissal of 1 Corinthians 14:34 – namely, as a later interpolation; as a Corinthian opinion; and as culturally obsolete – cannot be sustained. I now move on to considering the other group, the one that only partially rejects this verse by restricting the meaning of “speak” in it. This group also has a number of variants.

(4) One venerable way of neutralising “speak” in this verse is to argue that by it Paul meant “chat” or “prattle”, and that what he was prohibiting is women’s background chatter during the meetings.

It is conceivable that *laleō* means “prattle” in 13:11, but in between that verse and 14:34 there stand, as already said, twenty-one occurrences of the verb where it does not mean “chat” or “prattle”; and by verse 34 these twenty-one occurrences have clearly defined the nuance that Paul has in mind to be “the forms of speaking normal to assembly meetings.” Why would the Corinthians’ minds suddenly switch to this other meaning of *laleō* as they heard verse 34? Why would Paul have so consistently built up one nuance of *laleō* in verses 1-29, only to switch without warning to another in verse 34? Verse 34 conveys an *instruction*, and the essence of instructions is that they be expressed in

*The dismissal of 1 Corinthians 14:34
as culturally obsolete cannot be sustained.*

language clear to those being instructed. If Paul had meant “chatter” in verse 34, the Corinthians would certainly have mistaken his meaning.

In any case, this interpretation of verse 34 implies that Paul was perfectly happy for the men to disrupt the meetings by background chatter.

(5) The remaining attempts to restrict the meaning of “speak” in verse 34 are both designed to restrict it to “authoritative utterances”. The first such attempt hinges on construing the “asking” of verse 35 (“... let them ask their own husbands at home”) as interrogation. This is on the basis that the same verb (*eperōtaō*) is used of the high priest’s and Pilate’s questioning of the Lord in Mark 14:60, 61; Luke 22:64; 23:3,6. This verb, it is claimed, is reserved for the questioning of an inferior by a superior (cp. also Matthew 12:10; 16:1; Mark 15:44; Acts 5:27). Such questioning, asserts this school of thought, occurred during the judging of prophecies (v.29), and so in verse 34 Paul was excluding women from such judging.

But this argument is just plain wrong. Firstly, the same verb, *eperōtaō*, is also frequently used of the disciples asking questions of the Lord (e.g. Mark 9:28, 32; Acts 1:6). Secondly, would Paul really be recommending the wives to subject their husbands to this kind of interrogation at home? Finally, verse 35 itself defines Paul’s meaning as *asking in order to learn*, having already used the verb “learn” in verse 31. The questions being asked were plainly concerning points not understood in what the prophets had said. The women were not permitted to engage in even this.

(6) Another attempt to restrict “speak” in verse 34 to authoritative utterances rests its case on the verses preceding, rather than following, it. The claim is that verses 30-36 refer only to verse 29. More specifically, the claim is that verses 30-33 expand on “Let two or three prophets speak..”, and thus regulate the *prophesyings themselves*; and that verses 34-36 expand on “... and let the others judge”, and thus only regulate the “*judging*” of these *prophesyings*.

That verses 30-33 regulate prophesyings is obvious, but it is quite an assertion that verses 34-35 refer to verse 29b only. However this is their claim – except that not even they can keep to it. Recognising that Paul forbade women to teach in 1 Timothy 2:12, they need 1 Corinthians 14:34 at least tacitly to prohibit teaching as well as judging prophecies. But this lands them in a dilemma. If Paul consciously included teaching in the prohibition of verse 34, then verse 34 does not solely refer to the judging of prophecies in verse 29b after all, but also to verse 26, where teaching is mentioned. And here teaching is mentioned on a par with four other types of verbal participation in meetings of the church: “having” a hymn; speaking in a tongue, delivering a revelation (i.e.,

prophesying), and interpreting a tongue. If Paul’s “not permitted to speak” in verse 34 extends to “teaching” in verse 26, on what basis does it not also extend to these other speech activities in that verse?

But if, on the other hand, “speak” in verse 34 refers *only* to pronouncing verdicts on prophecies, then how would the Corinthians know that he also disapproved of women teaching? *They* had no access to 1 Timothy! Surely his *not* subsuming teaching under his ban of verse 34 would imply that he *did* permit women to teach? To reply that they would know that he didn’t because of his eighteen-month sojourn with them (Acts 18:11) invites the counter-reply, “Would they not then deduce that Paul did intend a reference to verse 26 in verse 34 after all?”

Thus, either these scholars allow a reference to verse 26 as well as verse 29b in verse 34, and admit that the prohibition of verse 34 must at least embrace all the speech activities of verse 26, or they must allow that in writing his letter Paul exempted teaching from the prohibition of verse 34, and then changed his mind by the time he wrote 1 Timothy 2:12.

In any case, this restriction of the meaning of “speak” in 1 Corinthians 14:34 to authoritative utterances, after twenty-one occurrences applying it generally to verbal participation in assembly meetings, demands quite impossible mental gymnastics on the part of the Corinthians.



All attempts to restrict the meaning of “speak” in verse 34 to less than its meanings in its previous twenty-one occurrences in the chapter fail. Common to all these attempts is the claim that to read “speak” as including praying and prophesying brings the verse into fatal contradiction with 1 Corinthians 11:5. There is no substance to this claim. But discussion of 11:5 must be deferred to another issue, God willing.



All attempts to restrict the meaning of “speak” in verse 34 to less than its meanings in its previous twenty-one occurrences in the chapter fail.



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The Holy Spirit of God and The Great Adversary

by A J Pollock
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Growing in the Christian faith is not easy. There's a war on! Satan is implacably opposed to the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. The Holy Spirit supplies His sword, the Word of God, with the definitive answer to each attack. It is vital to know what it says about each combatant.

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Any Christian wanting to advance in appreciating the spiritual land open to them in the power of the Spirit, will find there are many influences to deter them. The attacks are Satanic. Some are direct, others are subtle. The Christian's strength is only in the Lord Jesus Christ, but He provides armour to meet the attacks and tricks of the devil.

Almost the last item in the armour available is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God". It is not our sword, though Christians sometimes refer to their Bibles in that way. The Holy Spirit is the source of it, and the power for right usage of it, whether on the defensive or on the attack.

We need skill in its use; we need to let it discern and shape the thoughts and intentions of our own hearts first. Peter, with a sword, was an unskilful user at it: he was more at home with nets! He lashed about with that sword: it was a poor shot! In the Lord's hands the damage done was repairable. We need training in private with the Lord, alone with the Word of God. Then we shall not make wild sweeps with texts of Scripture, but find the skill to use the Word wisely, graciously, and in a way that even the devil will have difficulty in rebutting.

In this book the author presents his systematic examination of what the Word of God has to say about each of the two combatants in the spiritual war in which every Christian is engaged: the Holy Spirit and Satan, the Great Adversary. His object is twofold: to help Christians know their enemy, but supremely to enjoy in practice, through the presence and power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ over Satan at the cross.

As the author concludes his section on the Adversary, "Scripture throws light on these things, and it is well for us to gain what help we can from it. Not all subjects in Scripture are pleasant, but all are profitable, and for our learning."

The coming Saviour

Thou art coming, mighty Saviour!
“King of kings” Thy written name.
Thou art coming, royal Saviour!
coming for Thy promised reign.
Oh, the joy when sin’s confusion
ends beneath Thy rightful sway;
oh, the peace when all delusion
at Thy presence dies away.

Thou art coming, loving Saviour!
coming first to claim Thine own.
Thou art coming, faithful Saviour!
Thou would’st not abide alone.
In the Father’s house of glory
sinners saved shall dwell with Thee:
oh the sweetness of the story -
love’s own record we shall be!

Once Thy coming, holy Saviour,
brought Thee to the sinner’s place:
wondrous coming, lowly Saviour,
wonderful Thy love, Thy grace!
Thine the wisdom in the manger,
Thine the power upon the cross,
Thine the glory – as the Stranger,
riches – though in utter loss!

Thou art coming, crownèd Saviour,
not “the second time” for sin.
Thou art coming, thronèd Saviour,
bringing all the glory in.
All Thy Father’s house, its glory
hangs by sure behest on Thee:
Oh, the sweetness of the story!
Saviour come! We wait for Thee.

Hannah K. Burlingham (1842–1901)