**The Church at Corinth**

**A Church Facing Inner Problems – #33**

**Lack of Discerning the Spirits**

**1 Corinthians 12:1-3**

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***1*** *Now, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed about spiritual gifts.* ***2*** *You realize that, when you were pagans, you were attracted and carried away again and again to dumb idols.* ***3*** *Therefore, I make known to you that no one who is speaking by the spirit of God says, “Accursed is Jesus”; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” save by the Holy Spirit.*

**Major Problem**

This is a major problem that was affecting life in the Christian community of Corinth and our Christian life today.

1. How do we – each of us in a community – make use of many spiritual gifts diversely received by ourselves and others?
2. These diverse spiritual gifts can bring competition that can divine the community, which has one life as “the Body of Christ.”

**‘Spirit’ as Theme, Chapters 12-13-14**

1. The gifts of the Spirit will occupy the next three chapters (12:4–14:40). Paul is reacting against some Corinthian Christians who are vaunting one gift over another, especially speaking in tongues as the main gift of the Spirit. This was both an old and new problem.
2. In this section Paul puts in order all “spiritual things” given by the Spirit which are all for the One body of Christ. This does not allow superiority or extra authority. Abba Philēmōn once said:

“Authority: the devil is waiting to see how we use it, and when we use it, we give Satan the preferred place when it is used to gain power over others.”

1. Paul will discuss this problem by bringing what constitutes the life of the Christian church. He has used the Greek word ***Ekklesia*** (church) eight times (1:2; 4:17; 6:4; 7:17; 10:32; 11:16, 18, 22). The Spirit unifies all believers in the confessing one faith in “the Lord” for they belong to the body of Christ the “church”.
2. In the One Body there are no certain gifts of the Spirit which are better than others.
3. There are no “higher” or “lower” gifts of the Spirit because there are no higher or lower members of the one human body.
4. The so-called higher gifts, which some claim to be speaking in tongues, was a sign for unbelievers, and that prophecy was meant for believers. They were also querying the role of women in the church. In response, Paul shows that the gifts of the Spirit are varied but that each is meant to contribute to the common life of the one body, and he insists that love must be the indispensable motivation of all of the gifts. Abba Philēmōn said:

“You can tell that those who have pride in their words and in their actions are on the side of Satan because they work for the division of the One Body.”

1. Tongues are unintelligible speech, and in common worship of the One Body what is intelligible is needed for teaching and evangelization. Christian worship demands the building up of all members in the community, male and female alike.

**The Role of the Spirit**

Paul sets forth his fundamental teaching about the role of the Spirit. No one can confess the true faith, except with the grace of the Spirit. Paul provides negative and positive ways for discerning who is speaking with that Spirit, or who is a real Christian and who is false.

1. There was a common saying “Accursed is Jesus” that some people in Corinth were using and that Paul has learned about or heard it when he was at Corinth. This statement stands in contrast to the fundamental Christian confession, “Jesus is Lord” This has been the attitude of: Conzelmann, Fee, Hays, and Holtz.

2. Others (including: O Cullmann and Moffat) consider it a statement that could have been used by Jewish opponents of Christianity. Their evidence is that anathema as a curse formula comes from “only Jewish usage.”

3. Paul mentions in verse 2 that some of the members to whom he is writing were pagan before they became Christians, and “pagan” is a typically Jewish term for Gentiles.

4. In Gnostic circles, there are Gnostic Christians who “confess Christ.” Paul of course proclaims Christ as the Son of God. But since this Christ is born “of a women” (Gal 4:4), and because of the Gnostics’ hate of the human body, they go into ecstasy when they deny Jesus the man in the harsh words, “***anathema Iesous***” (*Gnosticism*, 127).

***‘Anathema Iesous’***

This saying was historically known to the great 3rd century Alexandrian Origen, who wrote a book as a reply to the Pagan Philosopher Celsus, ***Κέλσος***, a 2nd-century [Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greeks) [philosopher](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy) and opponent of  [Christianity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_Christianity). Celsus is known for his literary work, [*The True Word*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_True_Word) (Account, Doctrine or Discourse), which survives exclusively in Origen's quotations from it in [*Contra Celsum*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contra_Celsum). This work of Celsum, c. 177, is the earliest known comprehensive attack on [Christianity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity).

Said Origen, “For Celsus’ aim was that those who are unacquainted with our customs should, on perusing his treatise, at once assail us as if we called the noble Creator of this world an *“accursed divinity.”* Celsus appears to me, indeed, to have acted like those [Jews](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08399a.htm) who, when [Christianity](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) began to be first preached, scattered abroad false reports of the [Gospel](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06655b.htm), such as that *“*[*Christians*](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) *offered up an infant in* [*sacrifice*](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13309a.htm)*, and partook of its flesh;”* and again, *“that the professors of* [*Christianity*](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm)*, wishing to do the 'works of darkness,' used to extinguish the lights (in their meetings), and each one to have sexual intercourse with any* [*woman*](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15687b.htm) *whom he chanced to meet.”*

These [calumnies](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03190c.htm) have long exercised, although unreasonably, an influence over the minds of very many people, leading those who are aliens to the [Gospel](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06655b.htm) to [believe](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02408b.htm) that [Christians](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) are men of such a character; and even at the present day they mislead some, and prevent them from entering even into simple conversation with those who are [Christians](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm). With some such object as this in view does Celsus seem to have been actuated when he alleged that [Christians](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) term the Creator an *“accursed divinity.”* This in order that he who believes these charges against Christians, should, if possible, arise and exterminate the [Christians](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) as the most impious of [mankind](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09580c.htm).

Confusing, moreover, things that are distinct, Celsus also states the reason why the [God](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm) of the Mosaic cosmogony is termed *“accursed.”* Celsus asserts that *“such is his character, and worthy of execration in the opinion of those who so regard him, inasmuch as he pronounced a curse upon the serpent, who introduced the first* [*human*](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09580c.htm) *beings to the* [*knowledge*](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) *of good and* [*evil*](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm)*.” -- (Book 6:27-28)*

Origen also tells about Ophite Gnostics who would “not admit anyone into their meeting, unless he has first pronounced curses against Jesus” (Chadwick, Origen, 344; see also Origen, Catena fragment 47: “unless he (first) curses Jesus”).

E. Pliny the Younger, in writing to the emperor Trajan (c.110 AD), tells how he ordered people in his province (Bithynia in Asia Minor) to revile Christ, saying “that they should moreover revile Christ; none of which things those who are truly Christian, it is said, can be induced to do, … and they reviled Christ” (Ep. 10.96.5-6). Perhaps Paul already knew of similar attempts to revile Christ in Corinth.

**What Did Paul Intend to Teach?**

Paul is teaching Christians that when they are inspired by the Spirit they acknowledge that “Jesus is Lord” and recognize what this confession means in one’s life and conduct. Cursing does not belong to Christian faith and to Christian life.

**Letter from Philemon**

Brother George,

May Christ enlighten your mind and heart and strengthen your will by his love that you may be truly a disciple of the Lord Jesus our Beloved.

“Jesus is Lord” is not only a confession of the lips but is also a matter of life and death. Our Lord warned us that many will call Him Lord, but some will hear from the Lord, “I did not know you.”

Jesus is Lord of all that is eternal, for those who truly have received eternal life from Him know that without Jesus nothing in them is life or is eternal.

Eternal life is the life of Jesus himself, crucified and risen. We in Him are Dead to the world; that is, we have no source of life from the world and in Him we are alive to God our Father through the life that Jesus gives to us daily. He is our Lord whose love does not fail because His divine love can remove all obstacles. He is our Lord who sustains us in our struggle against sin. Jesus is our Lord who has planned our future life to be with Him in the kingdom and to sit with Him on His divine throne to rule the next glorious life in the new earth and the heaven.

He is our Lord who supplies us with His power to love our enemies as He loves His enemies. He is our Lord. He reveals the Fatherhood of God and gives us the Holy Spirit to be our Comforter.

“Jesus is my Lord” is my new Law that defines for me good and evil, for Jesus is the Good and what is not of Jesus or in Jesus is death and evil.

I pray that I have written the basic meaning of the confession but there is more than what I have said. But as you know that the Name of Jesus is our constant prayer.

Love the Lord of Love, Jesus the Lord

Philemon a sinner, but beloved of Jesus the Beloved of the Father.

5 July 1965

**Text Study**

**VERSE 1 –** *Now, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed about spiritual gifts.*

- “Spiritual things” or gifts has been used earlier in verse 10:1.

- Paul calls the Corinthians adelphoi, “fellow-Christians” a name of real sharing of faith and love.

- What is called spiritual is from the Holy Spirit

- The ***pneumatika***, the “spiritual,” comes from the Spirit and are not simply to be equated with the gifts of the Spirit or charismata but as the work of the Spirit as a whole in our life.

- John Chrysostom: “Paul calls the gifts spiritual because they are the work of the Spirit alone, owing nothing to human initiative.” (*Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* 29.2).

**VERSE 2 –** *You realize that, when you were pagans, you were attracted and carried away again and again to dumb idols*.

You were ***ethne***, that is, gentiles, which has a specific Jewish sense for those people who are not Israeli and do not worship the God of Israel. This is how the Greek word was used in the LXX (Deut 18:9; 2 Kgs 17:8; Wis 14:11; 15:15; Jer 6:4; and in Rom 3:29; 9:24; 11:13; 15:10). The former heathen or Gentile Christians who are also mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 4:5 and Galatians 4:8.

As for “you know” or “you realize that you were pagans” and “carried away to dumb idols,” the verb means “lead away,” often by force (Mark 14:44; 15:16). But here it connotes rather “being led astray.” Unfortunately, Paul does not say by whom or by what they are led astray, apart from the idols that he calls “dumb.” This is characteristic of such Corinthian Christians who did not recognize idols in their ignorance.

Paul is alluding to the rites of some pagan cults, in which participants in a trance were thought to be “led away” or “attracted,” that is, possessed by super-natural force. The Greek writer Lucian of Samosata (2nd century) depicts Paris in the Iliad of Homer, speaking of the power of love and saying to his comrade at Troy, the commander Protesilaus, “You know that it is not our choosing, but some powerful being leads us wherever it wills, and it is impossible to oppose it” (The *Iliad* (sometimes referred to as the *Song of Ilion* or *Song of Ilium, the quotation is in* Mortuorum dialogi 27.1).

John Chrysostom says:

“What Paul means is that if anyone in a pagan temple was at any time possessed by an unclean spirit and began to divine (i.e., speak in tongues), he was led away by that spirit like a man in chains and had no idea what he was saying. For it is peculiar to the soothsayer to be beside himself, to be under compulsion, to be pushed, to be dragged, to be greeted as a madman. But the prophet is not like this, because he has a sober mind and composed temper and knows exactly what he is saying.”

-- *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* 29.2

So the “leading astray” has the sense of being subordinate to idols.

Paul’s criticism of idols is expressed in one word “dumb” idols. The best criticism is in Psalm 135:15-18:

“*The idols of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not; neither is there any breath in their mouths. They that make them are like unto them: so is every one that trust in them.*”

-- (Compare, Ps 115:5 (LXX 113:12); Habakkuk 2:18–19; 1 Kgs 18:26–29)

Paul would be saying that such former pagans had been led astray unconsciously and unwittingly to the worship of idols. This is why Paul seeks in verse 3 and later in

12:4-14:40 to set the Corinthians straight and get them to realize that the Spirit inspires the basic confession of a Christian. Once this is realized, then Corinthian Christians will understand how to assess properly the variety of gifts that comes from the same Spirit.

**VERSE 3 –** *Therefore, I make known to you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Accursed is Jesus.”*

Literally “Jesus (is) anathema,” i.e., a curse, which is contrary to the declaration or confession “Jesus (is) Lord.” Paul begins his explanation with “therefore,” and emphasizes that he is correcting their ignorance, as he cites first a negative, then a positive example of how one discerns the working of the Holy Spirit. He has already spoken of “the Spirit of God” (2:10-11, 14; 7:40), “the Spirit coming from God” (2:12), “the Spirit of God (that) dwells in you” (3:16), and “the Spirit of our God” (6:11). It is to this Spirit, now understood as the presence of God in the community (see 12:11), that Paul here explicitly refers. He stresses that no one influenced by that Spirit could ever utter anything against Jesus of Nazareth. Paul uses, “*I make known to you*” (as in Gal 1:11; 2 Cor 8:1); he will again introduce his discussion with it in 1 Corinthians 15:1.

“*Accursed is Jesus*” (anathema Iesous). Supposedly, Paul as a Jew before his conversion cursed Jesus on the ground of what the Law is saying in Deuteronomy 21:22-23 “*cursed be everyone who has been hanged on a tree*” which Paul recalls in Galatians 3:13 (to Christ crucified, even though the LXX uses ***epikataratos***, “cursed,” rather than “anathema.”). The crucifixion of Jesus certainly would fall under that Deuteronomic andcurse. But that Paul himself cursed Jesus can’t be proved.

***Kyrios Iesous***, Jesus is Lord is understood as a counterpart to “***anathema Iesous***.” Hence “Accursed is Jesus” or “Jesus is accursed!” (ESV), is not to be taken as a wish, “Jesus be cursed!” (RSV), or “Let Jesus be cursed!” (NRSV), even though Paul uses anathema as a wish elsewhere (Rom 9:3; Gal 1:8–9; and 1 Cor 16:22). The declarative form of the slogan is what is meant.

The phrase ***anathema Iesous*** combines the name of Jesus, originally a Greek name but was given at his birth. It means “savior.” Here Paul by saying that one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” save by the Holy Spirit. I.e., no one can utter the fundamental Christian confession of faith unless he or she has received God’s Spirit.

Paul’s extols the name of Jesus as Lord, ***Kyrios***, which marks the final break away with Judaism and Paganism.

**Jesus is Lord / Kyrios Iesous**

With Judaism because this short form of confession have replaced the Jewish ***Shema*** ([Hebrew](http://universalium.academic.ru/125954/Hebrew): “Hear”), the Jewish confession of faith made up of three scriptural texts (Deut 6:4-9, 11:13-21; Num 15:37-41). The name ***Shema*** derives from the initial word of the scriptural verse “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord*” (Deut 6:4). The time for recital was determined by the first two texts: “when you lie down, and when you rise.” The Shema texts are also chanted at other times during the Jewish liturgy. The biblical verses inculcate the duty to learn, to study, and to observe the [Torah](http://universalium.academic.ru/212260/Torah). These texts and their appropriate prayers are consequently sacred to Jews because they contain a profession of faith, a declaration of allegiance to the kingship and kingdom of God, and a symbolic representation of total devotion to the study of the Torah. Since, however, meditation on the Torah “night and day” was a practical impossibility, the Shema became a substitute for Torah study or, more exactly, the minimum requirement for observing the precept. Following the example of the scholar-martyr Rabbi (A.D. 50-c135, rabbi and scholar: systematizer of Jewish oral law on which the Mishnah is based. Also called Akiba) the ***Shema*** has been uttered by Jewish martyrs throughout the ages as their final profession of faith in the one God of humankind and their love for him. Pious Jews hope to die with the words of the Shema on their lips.

The great hymn in Philippians 2:6ff is a great poetic utterance of the basic confession and proclamation of what has already shaped the Christian church, “Jesus is Lord.” In this hymn, the church acknowledges that Jesus as the risen Lord who is worthy of the same adoration mentioned in Isaiah 45:23 and is the glory of Yahweh.

The difference between the ***Shema*** and the Christian confession ***Jesus is Lord*** is that Christian confession is “by the Holy Spirit, the faith required to utter it comes only from God’s grace, bestowed by His Spirit” (Rom 8:9; Eph 2:8; 1 Jn 4:2-3).

Whoever can say, “Jesus is Lord” is a Christian whose life comes from the Lord who gives the Spirit to aid us to remain in communion with Him.

***Pope’s Notes***

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