

Not Many Wise After the Flesh

The picture usually formed of this community of Corinth represents it as composed of merely poor and uncultured people. I do not believe that correct. Paul, it is true, speaks of “not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble.” We must distinguish, however, between “not many” and “not any...” This community, indeed, must have presented a very motley appearance. As Paul says, there were Jews and Greeks there, but under the latter designation we must remember he includes all non-Jews, the heathen of all countries...

What was the bond, we must ask, that held all these together? What was the new element that gave them something in common and lifted them out of the world that lay about them? It was in the first place the name of Jesus Christ; they were baptised in it (1 i. 13); they confessed it (1 i. 2). The power contained in this name is indicated to us by Paul. It is the Shibboleth which reveals the man who possesses the Spirit of God and the man who does not. The glad confession, “Jesus is the Lord,” and the hostile, “Let Jesus be anathema” (1 xii. 3), are the two antagonistic forces; two worlds part asunder on this name, two spiritual kingdoms.

In the second place it was the Spirit of God possessed by all of them, Who manifested Himself with demonstration and with power. It was not the knowledge, however important and rich in result, that there is one God, Maker of Heaven and earth, which was the distinguishing element. Many Jews and adherents of the synagogue already possessed this knowledge. Everything turned on the possession of the Spirit of this God, Who proved Himself to be mightier than all the Spirits and demons of heathendom. It was in the full sense of the word a communion of the spirit which consisted in a continuous and incredibly intensified enthusiasm, in an inspiration which exalted every faculty to the manifestation of miracle even in the natural domain. To this Spirit nothing was impossible.

He found utterance in ecstatic speech, imparted hidden mysteries, and made prophets and teachers of the uncultured. He inspired every sort of manifestation of ministering love, of guiding wisdom, of self-sacrificing devotion. He performed miracles, he healed diseases, moved mountains, and transformed men, who felt themselves miserable and oppressed, into a cloud of witnesses overflowing with strength and courage.

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