

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE HEART: WHAT IT IS

A SERMON

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“But if I depart, I will send him unto you.” John 16:7

THE disciples, Judas of course excepted, were regenerated men, and were so united to the Lord Jesus Christ that they could not dislike him, they could not hate him, nor could they leave him in reality; for when they forsook him and fled, they took him with them in their hearts; they took with them the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit still dwelt in them; grace still dwelt in them; so that they could not give up their concern for eternal things. But though they could not do otherwise than love the Savior and though they could not in reality leave him, still there were many things as yet that exceedingly perplexed them, and very much stumbled them. “All you shall be offended,” or, as the same word is sometimes rendered, “stumbled, because of me this night.” And it does appear that they had an idea that the Lord Jesus Christ would continue on the earth and establish his kingdom on the earth. You know how the Old Testament speaks of the peacefulness, and prosperity, and glory of the kingdom of Christ; and this they appear to have looked for; the same as many are looking for an earthly millennium or kingdom now. But in this the disciples were disappointed. And when the Savior gave them to understand that he was about to depart from them, and to depart out of the world, this, as yet, staggered them very much. And then, when he assured them that, so far from having a kingdom of peace on earth, he was not even come to send peace on earth; and that, so far from their having this path of ease, and quiet, and happiness on earth, they should be hated of all men, they should be persecuted, they should be outcast, brought before magistrates, and in every way illtreated for his name; he says, “Because I have said these things, sorrow has filled your hearts.” But afterwards, when they understood the meaning of his words, that it was expedient that he should go away; “for if I go not away,” said the Savior, “the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart,” says our text, “I will send him unto you;” when they were brought to see this, they would naturally among themselves say the one to the other, If we had understood then, as we do now, the nature of his departure, we should have done then as he said. He said, “If you loved me, you would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father; for my Father is greater than I.” I am going to increase your greatness, not to lessen it.

In noticing our text this morning, the text itself, looking at it in the letter of it, would lead me to notice the first part of it first, namely, the departure of the Savior. But somehow my mind seems inclined to take the latter part of our text first; namely, *the coming of the Holy Spirit*.

It is, perhaps, right for me to say, because I wish to remember that there are always, in a congregation like this, while many of you know, the truth savingly, there are some of you, perhaps, that are just beginning to inquire, and some of you that perhaps have no real concern about your state at all; I wish, therefore, so to speak that as many as possible shall understand what I mean. Let it, then, be understood in the outset, that without the Spirit of Christ we are none of his; that unless the Holy Spirit quicken our souls, unless we are born of spiritual water, or of water and the Spirit, or by the word and Spirit of the Lord, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. This at once shows the necessity of our being thus personally partakers of the Holy Spirit. So that, however good you are in your own eyes, and in the eyes of others, and indeed, however morally good you are, and however excellent you are, yet all this, while it will go for something in its place in this world, in salvation matters it will go for nothing at all. That is not the worst of it; not only will your doings in salvation matters go for nothing; that is not the worst of it; the worst of it is that you also will go for nothing. If you have not the Spirit of Christ you will not be reckoned a Christian; you will not be reckoned a child of God, for you are not born of God; you will not be reckoned one with Christ, for you are not engrafted into Christ, nor possessing the unity of the Spirit; you will not be reckoned one of God's chosen, for the Lord has not brought you near unto him. So that this, then, brings before us that which is essential to our eternal welfare. Let us trace out then, as carefully as we can, the coming of the Holy Spirit, in other words, the work of the Holy Spirit. And in so doing, I will describe the feelings which the Holy Spirit produces, and the truths into which the Holy Spirit, where he is the teacher, is sure to lead. Now, without enlarging upon the connection, which we have enlarged upon not very long ago, I may just lightly touch upon what is said in the connection before I go to other parts of the word of God. Now, "when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin." And when the Holy Spirit reproves of sin, I will tell you what he does, what his reproof does. His is not a mere letter reproof; his is not a reproof merely to the outward ear; his is not a reproof, only a reproof, and then leaves it, and leaves you to make the best of it. That is not the way the Holy Spirit reproves the world, that is the Gentiles, for they were to be gathered in; that is not the way he do his work. If you go to the 40th of Isaiah you will get there, as well as in other scriptures, a description of the way in which the Holy Spirit does his work. "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry?" Why, "All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field; the grass withers, the flower fades, because the Spirit of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people is grass." So that you are there compared to grass that is scorched up. And what a worthless thing is a piece of scorched grass! what a helpless thing is a piece of withered and scorched grass! The Spirit of the Lord, he blows upon it, scorches it up. And the meaning is this, that you become so convinced of sin, and that by the word and Spirit of the living God, that you begin to be sensible that you have nothing but sin to call your own; that you have not a particle of holiness; that Satan himself could not wish you to be more destitute of holiness than you are; that the great enemy of your souls could not wish you to be more destitute of righteousness than you are; that he who would tyrannize over you and bring you down into his dread abode could not wish you to be more helpless than you are; though he is heartily sorry to see you conscious of this. Now, who would think of setting a blade of grass, especially scorched grass, to work, to bear a burden, to run a race, to achieve a victory, or to do anything? Can you conceive anything more helpless? And yet this is the figure used by the Holy Spirit, and this is that to which

he brings the sinner. Now, my hearer, let us ask the question, do we know what it is then to be lying between the two mountains of brass, between the law and the gospel, and we can reach neither? There is the law against us, there is the gospel for us, but we cannot get at it. There we are, poor, withered, burning grass. And you are not to the worst yet; for worldly troubles, worldly provocations, Satanic temptations, will set in, and bring to light a great many evils in your heart that you have not yet seen, and that you have not yet felt. So that you will go on until the Holy Spirit's reproof will go so far as to bring you entirely to nothing, to turn all your comeliness into corruption, and bring you down; and then, in the Lord's own time, you will begin to say, Ah, some complain of such and such ministers being too high, in doctrine; but, you will say, they cannot be too high for me; I had no idea I was the poor, helpless, worthless, destitute creature that I am. This is what the Holy Spirit did on the day of Pentecost, and this is what he does now.

And this appears to me to be the great deficiency of the professing world in our day. We have a wonderful deal of profession. It is that kind of profession that the majority of professors are very much holier in their own estimation than God's truth is. The truths of the gospel, free grace truths of the gospel in their positive character, certainty, order, adaptation, and suitability, are, by the majority, reckoned dangerous, and that those doctrines lead to sin. Why, what is this but holding yourself holier than the doctrines of the gospel? And if you hold yourself holier than the doctrines of the gospel, then you hold yourself holier than God, and you are a stink in his nostrils. Of all characters, none is more detestable in the sight of the Lord than that man who is better in his own eyes than are the truths of the gospel, and, consequently, better than God himself. But where the Holy Spirit is the teacher, he will carry his reproof so far, you will be brought down, as I have said, so low, and so brought to nothing, that your question then will not be whether you are to do your part or not, but whether there is a salvation complete without your doing anything, and that if God would bring such a salvation as that in, that will save you; your question then will not be what you are to do, but what God has done. You will begin to inquire then after what he has done; and the more you see into what he has done, the more hope will rise. That is one thing, then; the Holy Spirit will thus reprove of sin. And what will be the result? Why does he reprove you thus of sin? Why, because you did not believe in Jesus Christ. And no man ever did, no man ever will, and no man ever can believe in Jesus Christ aright without this reproof, without this work of the Holy Spirit. "Blessed is the man whom you chasten;" fairly implying that cursed is the man whom you do not thus chasten. "Blessed is the man whom you chasten," "And if you be without chastisement," without this discipline, without this soul work, "then are you bastards, and not sons." "Of sin, because they believe not on me." Now, let us have a twofold representation of the Savior suited to such. He shall convince such "of righteousness;" "of righteousness, because I go to my Father." I will not here dwell upon the Savior's departure, further than just to observe that it is a beautiful representation. "Of righteousness, because I go to my Father." I go to my Father righteously. I have wrought righteousness; I have brought in everlasting righteousness, and I have perfected forever all them that are sanctified. Now, then, where this work of the Holy Spirit is, it is sure to lead you into the knowledge of what Christ has done, and he will become your salvation, and he will become your life, and he will become your confidence, and you will see that you ought to have, you will really see that you ought to have unbounded confidence in God, because what Christ has done authorizes that unbounded confidence. Satan may be at your right hand to thrust you away if possible; but no; there you must remain, waiting and watching until the Lord shall arise and command that liberty of soul which, in his own time, you shall realize. "And of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged." That I apprehend to mean the final defeat of Satan.

You observe that Satan ruined us in the fall, but he cannot ruin us in Christ; he cannot touch us there; there we have a life, and holiness, and righteousness, and everything that is beyond his reach. And, as we sometimes, in illustrating this point, observe, that he also ruined the Jews in their dispensation, because they had no hidden life; I do not now speak of those that were spiritually minded, that believed in Christ; I speak of them merely as Abraham's natural descendants, and having a dispensation after the law of a carnal commandment. They had no hidden life out of the reach of Satan. Their life was a national, social, externally constituted life, and when that was gone all was gone. Whereas the life the Christian has is in Christ, and in that life the Christian abides, and the wicked one touches him not. Some have been very much perplexed as to the meaning of that scripture I have just quoted, "He abides, and the wicked one touches him not." It does not mean that the wicked one does not touch us in ourselves, nor in our circumstances, nor in a variety of other ways, but it means that the wicked one touches you not as you stand in Christ. Although the wicked one destroyed all that Job had, and would have destroyed his life, he could not destroy Job, even Job's natural life; but even if he had done that, that would not have touched the life that Job had in Christ; that would not have touched the holiness, righteousness, inheritance, and blessedness he had in Christ. Here, then, it is those who are thus reprov'd, and are convinced of what Christ has done, and are convinced of the final defeat of the enemy, these are they that are led by the Spirit of God; and this is nothing else; this spirit of real humiliation, arising from the knowledge of what you really are, is nothing else but the Spirit of Christ; and this acquaintance with what Christ has done is nothing else but the Spirit of Christ; and this confidence in God by the final defeat of the adversary is nothing else but the Spirit of Christ. And I wish you to notice that there was just as much certainty in the coming of the Holy Spirit according to the predictions that related to him as there was certainty in the coming of Christ according to the predictions that related to him. And second, there was just as much certainty in the Holy Spirit's accomplishing infallibly his work when he came according to predictions concerning him, as there was that Jesus Christ should accomplish his work according to predictions concerning him. It is well for you to observe this because we live in a day when the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are separated. We live in a day when men confess that the Savior came according to prediction, and that he accomplished all that prediction set forth, and that he rose, and went to heaven according to the Scriptures; but that the Holy Spirit, say they, comes, and he would do more, but cannot. He fails amazingly, according to their account, but he did not according to the Scripture account; no, bless his holy name! Hence, then, comes the Day of Pentecost, and the Holy Spirit came. And it is not my object to range over that wonderful chapter this morning: I will take just a sample or two. It is said, "There appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them," and this is explained to mean the Holy Spirit, "and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Now let us stop here for a moment, because these cloven tongues of fire are of great importance to us. Now, first, tongues of fire. That denotes the living character of the ministers of the gospel; that the apostles would go forth as burning and shining lights; that the apostles should not preach a dead gospel, but a living, burning gospel. "Is not my word like fire, says the Lord?" And do not the Savior say, "I came to send fire, and what will I do if it be already kindled?" And so here the fire, therefore, denotes the living power of the gospel. And so, the minister, who knows this living power of the gospel, why, it burns in that minister's soul, it burns in his heart, and it burns in his mind. And its hallowed fire, its holy fire, its heavenly fire burns up doubts, and fears, and worldly-mindedness, and that which is carnal, and sweetly and divinely consecrates us to the blessed God, that our souls ascend to heaven in this holy and sacred fire, as sacrifices acceptable unto God. "Did not our heart burn within us, while

he talked with us by the way?” And is it not so now? Whenever a sermon is made to you living power, warms your heart, endears the Savior, burns off, as it were, your fetters, illuminates the mind, and makes you happy, why, that is nothing else but being baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Oh, those seasons are precious beyond all description; and when the Lord is pleased thus to baptize our souls again and again, to immerse us into this heavenly and hallowed fire, then how everything contrary to the welfare of our souls departs! and we are happy then. This burning, living, immutable love of God is the very element of the soul of the real Christian. It is, therefore, very suggestive. Now, what know we of this power of the Holy Spirit? What! a minister come and preach always in a level, monotonous, quiet, take-easy manner, as though he picked up a few notions for his head, and he comes and says them out like a schoolboy. No, my hearer, that is not divine teaching. Divine teaching is, that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks;” divine teaching is that “out of the good treasure of the heart;” and what is that but the truth in the experience of it? Out of the good treasure of the heart, and what is that, but the love of God shed abroad in the heart? And hence, when one of old said that he would not speak in the name of the Lord anymore, nothing but vitality would do for him. “While I was musing, the fire burned, and I could not hold my peace.” He knew that all preaching from the head merely, he knew that all preaching from mere got-up sermons, like men getting up lectures for special occasions, he knew that all such preaching was of the flesh; that it would end where it began; he knew that all such sounds were nothing but sounding brass and the tinkling cymbal. But when the fire of God’s love burned in his soul,

“Then he could tell to sinners round
What a dear Savior he had found.”

And this would warm the hearts of the people; and this burning love of God in the soul would lead them on and cause them to run cheerfully in the ways of the Lord. Here it is, when this is realized, you know then that the winter is passed, that the rain is over and gone, that the time of the singing of birds is come; everything appears paradisiacal and pleasing, and you will say, If this be a foretaste of heaven, I do not care how soon I am there. If the love of God is capable of making me so happy while on earth for a little time, then what must heaven be,

“Where saints and angels draw their bliss
Immediately from Thee!”

Here, then, is the Spirit of God to reprove, to reveal, and to warm the heart and soul. But there is another important feature, indeed, all important, and that is that they were not only fiery, but they were *tongues*. That is to denote the eloquence, if I may so call it; eloquence means good speaking, with which all the saints of God shall testify to eternity of the things of God. They shall speak plainly, as the margin reads, 32nd of Isaiah, speak elegantly. And so, when the apostle was caught up, he saw these fiery tongues, as it were, realized in perfection; he heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Yet, as Watts says,

“Fond of our prison, of our clay,”

we shrink back; we see so little of the glories of these eternal things. They were cloven tongues; evidently denoting that these men of God should rightly divide the word of truth. Now there is a

fourfold division of the word of truth maintained in the Scriptures, and which every man sent of God will maintain, and which everyone taught of God will understand, recognize, realize, contemplate, receive, bless God for, and glorify him by; rightly dividing the word of truth, cloven tongues, not wrapping things all up together. What is that fourfold division, then? First, they are rightly to divide the word of truth *characteristically*, that is the first division. "He that believes shall be saved." "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved;" and that "eye has not seen nor ear heard the things that God has prepared for them that love him;" and again, "The poor and the needy shall praise your name;" and again, "He will hear the prayer of the destitute; this shall be written for the generation to come, and the people that shall be created," created in Christ Jesus, "shall praise the Lord." Now that is an essential division, right division, dividing characteristically; to take forth the precious from the vile, and thus to describe the Christian by the work of the Holy Spirit and by the fruits of the Holy Spirit both. And I am persuaded that men not taught of God are as ignorant of the true character of the Christian as they are of all other departments of the new covenant. Step into our churches and chapels, and you will hear a dry moral description given of a Christian, and that is the pious Christian, without any internal work. They talk about the heart, but it is not in their power to describe that reproof that I have described this morning; it is not in their power to describe that divine revelation of Jesus to which I have referred this morning; for if they knew these things, I am quite sure they would not be able to keep them to themselves; they must speak that they have seen and heard; and the reason they preach such gospels as they do is because they know no better. God open their eyes if it be his will. Now that is one division of truth, then, characteristic; and every Christian feels the importance of this part. Ah, he says, am I wheat, or going along with the tares? Am I a sheep, or a goat? Am I a child of God, or a child of the wicked one? Am I going to heaven, or on my way to hell? Am I born of God, or am I not? Did Jesus die for me, or did he not? These are questions that will try the Christian more or less. That is one division. The second division of truth is the *legal*; that is, he must rightly divide between law and gospel. How clear the Scriptures are upon this! See the latter part of the 5th of the Romans. The law entered as a demand upon man that he should perform those ten commandments, as a demand upon man that he should do all the law required. That is the legal intention of the law. But the Lord had a higher intention, and a better intention than this. The law entered that the offence might abound. Saul of Tarsus did not see this; no; he thought he stood well with God's law; he had no idea he stood so much against God's law. Why, he says, circumcised the eighth day, even the right day; I am a pure Hebrew, belonging to the strictest sect; as touching the law, blameless. That was his idea, then. I stand well with the law. But when God took the law in hand, and brought it into his soul, then it was that sin abounded, and Saul says, or Paul says, "I died." You die to all false hope. Here, then, is the law; the law has nothing but wrath, nothing but condemnation; the law has nothing, as the apostle shows in the 5th of the Romans, but the ministration of death, the ministration of condemnation and bondage. Then the gospel stands not amalgamated with it; it stands in direct contrast to it. The gospel comes in and brings life, and liberty, and righteousness, and assimilating power. The law never assimilated a man to God yet, and never will. If it could have done so, it would have done so at Sinai; there was a full manifestation of the law; but did that assimilate the people to God, did that make them holy, and did that make them righteous? It struck them with terror, that is all it could do; it did not assimilate them to God. But the gospel comes in and assimilates us to God. The apostle sums up the whole in this way: "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory;" from one degree of revelation to another; from one degree to another, "as by the Spirit of the Lord." Here, then, is another contrast; first, contrast of character; and

second, contrast of law and gospel; rightly to divide the word of truth. Now if you are taught of the Spirit of God, these distinctions, as well as the others I have to name, will be a matter of vital and of eternal importance to you. Men do not see them in the Bible, but they are in the Bible, and it is for you to find them out, and to understand them, and to know them, and honestly turn your back upon every professed public teacher that is in the dark on this matter; that makes the gospel a kind of “Lo, here!” and “Lo, there!” without any certainty of sound or decision. The third right division of truth is that of the *testamentary*. Oh, how important is this! You know the Wesleyans, they bandied me about with the old covenant. “Why will you die, O house of Israel?” If the righteous man turns from his righteousness, and does that which is wrong, he shall die; and if the wicked man turns from his wickedness, and do that which is righteous, he shall live. They bandied me about, and I could not make it out; and other scriptures seemed to speak differently, and they bungled up the whole together; and there was I as miserable as I could be. But by-and-bye when the Lord steps in and says, “Behold, I will make a new covenant, not according to the old one.” Not according to the old one? I began to see; and I am a lover of this part of the right division of the word of truth unto this day. Oh, I love the new covenant; I love the sworn covenant; there I find a Priest forever; there I find a faithful and unchanging God; there I find all my salvation and all my desire, rightly dividing the word of truth. Bless the dear Savior’s name! he has blotted out the handwriting of a broken covenant that stood against us, and taken it out of the way, and nailed it to his cross; and now I can read the 28th of Deuteronomy, with its sixty-three or four curses, and look at them all, and say, “These are the curses that my sins have entailed, but Jesus’ blood has blotted them all out; I am, therefore, delivered, first from the portion of the unbeliever, second from the curse of the law, and third from the curse of a broken covenant and now I have to deal with God, and God with me, on new covenant grounds, by the blood of the everlasting covenant that brought again our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, by which all heaven is dedicated unto the saints, and by which they reign and are made happy, and that forever.

All these and a great many other things are implied in the cloven tongues. And I do not think I am out of order here. “If I depart, I will send him unto you.” And when the Holy Spirit came, and did all this on the day of Pentecost, he brought the people to know what they were; Christ was revealed to them, and these great divisions of truth were, I admit, by many of them learnt afterwards more clearly. But there is a fourth division, right division of truth, not less important and what is that? One that I glory in, my hearer. The fact is, I glory in all of them. I glory in not being an unbeliever, but in being a believer; I glory in the gospel, in contrast to the law. Nay, more; so strong is my feeling upon that, that my very language is, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ;” and the law dead to me, and I dead to that. I glory in the third right division, namely, the new covenant in contrast to the old. So, I do in the fourth. What is the fourth? The first is characteristic, the second is legal, the third is testamentary, and the fourth is *federal*. These are the four right divisions of God’s word, into which, if you have the Spirit of Christ, you will be led. The fourth is *federal*; that is, you must distinguish between the first and the last Adam, and let the first Adam have nothing to do with your salvation, shut him out altogether, let him have no hand in it. He was an old man after he had sinned; for it was sin that made him old. He is old now, and will be old, and will be down to the end of time. So that in the first Adam, there, in our federal head, we have nothing but death, decrepitude, privation, misery, and at the end eternal condemnation. But in the last Adam, Christ Jesus, ah! there we have a headship that can never give way; there we have a Paradise held for us by Jesus Christ. The first Paradise was held by the first Adam for the human race; the second Paradise is held by the last Adam for the chosen race. The

first creation, holiness, righteousness, peace, and happiness, were held by the first Adam for the human race; but life, and peace, and holiness, and happiness, and heaven, and eternal glory, are held for the chosen race by the last Adam. Here, then, the cloven tongues will thus rightly divide the word of truth. Now may the Lord help you to take these four! You see what a nice inheritance it is. First, to take your place among real Christians, and to be able to say with the Psalmist, "You have given me the heritage of them that fear your name," and a blessed heritage it is. Then, second, to take your place, not in the law, but in the gospel, and to see how Jesus has taken your law place. And then, third, to take your place, not in the old, but in the new covenant, and to see how Jesus has blotted out the penalties of the old. And then, fourth, to take your place, not in old nature's supposed goodness or doings, for that would be making the first Adam your refuge, but to take your place in your covenant Head. "You are complete, in him who is the head of all principality and power." And I am sure that the man that can thus see into these things, and is favored by the grace of God to take a place in these heavenly spheres among these bright and shining stars, risen to go down no more forever, I am sure such an one may well say, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, and I have a goodly heritage."

One more item, and then I close, upon this work of the Holy Spirit, what he brings us down to, and what he brings us into. Now, where the Holy Spirit is the teacher, he prepares the soul for those truths that I close my discourse with this morning. Now it is the word of the Lord that I am about to name; 8th of the Romans, "The Spirit also helps our infirmities, and makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." That scripture is difficult to some people. Why should it be? Why, I am so miserable sometimes, I do not know what I want; I am as uneasy, as restless, as foreboding, and I cannot account for it. If I were to try to pray, some things I should be ashamed to say before the Lord, and some things afraid to say, and other things, perhaps, I could not say; and there I am, a poor, miserable creature, and I think the Lord is against me, and all is against me, and I wish I had never been born. Now, would you believe it, that these very sighing's, mingled though they are with so much rebellion, and so much unbelief, yet with these very sighing's the Holy Spirit makes intercession? and Christ, there it is, offers much incense with these secret, heartfelt prayers of the saints; and the incense fragrance of his name takes away all the ill savor, and sends our sighs and groans to God, and they are in the Savior's hands turned into mighty powers with God, and down shall come, in his own time, answers of peace. And then look at the order of this; though I ought to have said, Is it not encouraging to us to love the Lord, to cleave to him? People say, Why do not you pray? and the man is praying all the time, and does not know he is; but the Lord knows it. There is a child crying, and the mother knows it, and she may be right or may be wrong in her guesses of the cause of the child's crying. It is uneasy about something; the child is too young to describe it, and the mother may mistake as to what the cause of its uneasiness may be; but not so with our God. He will never misunderstand; he knows better than we ourselves do. Job might well say, "I desire to reason with God." What I am aiming at now is to show what real Christian experience is, how the Holy Spirit intercedes, and what this experience leads to; because, if it does not lead you to what the apostle there presently describes, it shows it is not real. (See Romans 8: 28, 29, 30.)