

# The Work of the Holy Spirit

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THIS is a large subject, and only a few aspects of it can be looked at in one address. This being so I will try to confine myself to what I consider to be some of the more important and practical points of it. Our choice of this subject is the result of enquiry by quite a number of earnest intelligent people in this place, concerning our belief in the person and work of the Holy Spirit. As the report has gone round, here and elsewhere, that we do not believe in the Holy Spirit, let me open this discourse by a brief, general statement of our belief in regard thereto. First, then, our belief in the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit is a deep, strong, and settled belief. We admit no one to fellowship who doubts or denies here. Second, we believe that the men who wrote the Scriptures were inspired by the Holy Spirit; and, therefore, we have in the Bible the mind of the Spirit. Third, we believe that the Holy Spirit dwells in the Christian. Fourth, we believe that the Holy Spirit is an active agent in the conversion of every sinner. And as it was questions and conversation concerning the work of the Spirit in conversion that gave rise to this subject, let this have our first attention.

## Life can only come from Life

Here, on former occasions, we have said that Christianity is more than a code of rules for life. It is not only that, but it gives a new life; and we believe that it holds good all along the line that life must come from life, and this higher and better life can only come from the Living Spirit of the Living God. *"If any man be in Christ he is a new creature."* *"He that hath the Son hath life."* This life is begotten in us by the Holy Spirit.

## How the Spirit Operates

We now come to the question, "How does this Holy Spirit beget life in the sinner?" Does He use means, or does He act directly upon the spirit of man without any instrumentality? That the Spirit begets life by means of the Gospel is placed beyond doubt by such passages as the following: *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth: to the Jew first and also to the Greek"* (**Romans 1:16**). *"For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel"* (**1 Corinthians 4:15**). *"Having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and*

*abideth*" (**1 Peter 1:23**, R.V.). If the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, if life is begotten by the Gospel, or, in other words, by the incorruptible seed of the Word of God, who can deny that the Spirit uses instrumentality in bringing about this great change? The circumstances in which an over-ruling Providence places us have often much to do in causing us to give the Gospel an earnest, candid hearing; but, in our day, as far as it is known to me, the light that leads to life must come from Holy Writ.

## **The Indwelling of the Spirit**

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Christian is clearly proved by such passages as 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20, R.V.: "*Or know you not that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have from God? And ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price; glorify God, therefore, in your body.*" The epistle from which this quotation is made was not only written to the church in Corinth, but also to all those in every place who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this passage Paul bases an exhortation to holiness upon the fact that the body of every saint is a temple of the Holy Spirit. It is by no means clear that all the members in any church in the days of the Apostles possessed such miracle-working power as Peter and John were the means of conferring upon those who received the word in Samaria (Acts 8). That all the saints everywhere possessed such gifts I do not think that any reflecting person would be rash enough to affirm. Therefore, Paul must here be referring to the indwelling of the Spirit possessed by every Christian, and not to those special and miraculous gifts which, though common then, were not possessed by all saints.

## **Concerning Miraculous Gifts**

Concerning the special spiritual gifts to which we have alluded, we believe they were essential to the establishing of the faith once for all delivered to the saints. But now that they are not essential, they have, as far as we know, been removed from the earth. We have met many who profess to have these gifts still; but we have met no one who gave proof of such possession. If a man possesses miracle-power he is bound to know it; if he does not he is bound to know. Therefore, when I meet a man who lays claim to that power I do not think he is deceiving himself; I only think he is anxious to deceive me. All the

while I remain open to conviction. I have acted upon this rule for many years, and I have never had any reason to regret it.

## **Things We do not Believe**

I have briefly stated what we believe in regard to the person and work of the Holy Spirit. I have no doubt it will strike some of you as strange that a body of people believing all this should be blamed for not believing in the Holy Spirit. We cannot withhold the conviction that many of those who are doing so will one day be sorry that they did it. We are of opinion that this false report has arisen out of what we do not believe rather than out of what we do believe. No man can believe all that is put in the name of the Spirit's work at the present time; and we, like other religious people, cannot help doubting a number of things that are put forth in connection therewith. Permit me, then, to state a few things that, upon the whole, we do not believe.

### ***That He Operates directly***

In the first place, it is commonly believed that a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the spirit of man is necessary before he can believe in or receive the Gospel. There are very few people among us who believe this. If the Gospel does not come within the reach of man as he is, he cannot be responsible for rejecting it. No man can be truly said to reject what never came within his reach. If, therefore, the Gospel is not placed within the reach of man, it is no Gospel for him. Again and again those who hear the Gospel are threatened with condemnation if they reject it; but to condemn men for rejecting the Gospel when they had not the power to receive it, would be unjust. God has so made us that we cannot help thinking so, and we cannot believe that God would give us a religion that would outrage the reason that He has given us. But I need not stay to prove that all you who are rejecting the Gospel have the power to receive it; you know all that too well to require to be told of it by me. You know that you can, but will not. The story of God's love, and of Christ's life and death and resurrection, though grand, is all too plain to lie beyond the reach of comprehension. The motives presented to induce us to accept Christ are the clearest, the highest, and the best that can be thought of, and to deny that we have the power to believe in and yield to Christ is to deny that of the truth of which we are all conscious, and we cannot doubt that of the truth of which we are conscious, come what may. But, what is best of all, I am sure that not one of you

can quote a passage from the Word of God that plainly says that it is impossible for a sinner, without supernatural aid, to believe in and receive Christ.

### ***That he is to blame for men being unsaved***

It may look very humble to say we can do nothing, and the Holy Spirit must quicken us, and give us the power to believe the Gospel. But, my dear friends, this has another and a terrible side to it, which is this: If the sinner can do nothing in regard to receiving Christ, then he has no responsibility in the matter; on the other hand, if the Holy Spirit must do all in causing us to receive the Gospel, then with Him rests all the responsibility, and, therefore, the Holy Spirit is to blame for every unconverted soul. From this conclusion we shrink back in horror. We know that the blame does not rest there. You who are unsaved know that at this moment you are resisting the Holy Spirit in rejecting the Gospel of Christ, for the Holy Spirit is at this moment pleading with you by means thereof. Stephen blamed his countrymen for resisting the Holy Spirit, and what they could do, you can. When God loves all, and Christ died for all, how can you doubt that the Holy Spirit is equally interested in the salvation of all? And if it all rested with Him you would all be saved; but He is pleading and you are resisting. When we take this view of the matter, some people take it upon them to say that we deny the work of the Holy Spirit. In doing so, they wrong us.

### ***That He Ever contradicts His own Word***

Again, in nearly every place I visit I find people who know they are saved because the Holy Spirit, by voice, vision, dream, or wonderful sensation, has given them this information. Now, we do not doubt the sincerity of the people who talk thus, and when the vision or dream is in harmony with the Scriptures we pass no judgment upon it, though we have grave doubts about present-day revelations. But we are sorry to say that these revelations are not always in harmony with the Scriptures. We know, for example, that Jesus said, "*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned*" (**Mark 16:15, 16**). Now, that this law of pardon was spoken by Jesus and placed in God's book by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we have abundance of well-tested evidence. This same law of pardon is traceable all through the Book of Acts, and there are unmistakable allusions to it in the Epistles. That this same law is for all the world, and, therefore, for us, it also

carries on its face. Now, the people who profess to have had direct information from the Holy Spirit in regard to salvation do not, as a rule, bring forward their revelations to corroborate God's plan of salvation, but to contradict it.

When a man places himself and his revelation against the Bible, I have surely a right to place the Bible against him and his revelation. The Holy Spirit would not inspire men to write the Scriptures and then inspire a man to come and contradict them. The man and his supposed revelation are but of yesterday, and to place himself and his revelation against the grand old Book, that has stood the test of centuries, is the highest presumption. We do the more reasonable thing. When we cannot believe both, we believe the Bible and reject the man. When we do so that man goes away and says we do not believe in the work of the Holy Spirit, and thus a false report gets abroad about us. That man has a perfect right to say that we do not believe in him, but he has no right to say that we do not believe in the work of the Holy Spirit.

### ***That He is the Author of Confusion***

Take a brief look at another source from which this mistaken report comes. In a small town of my acquaintance there are three meetings of the people known as "Brethren." When they meet for worship all three gatherings claim the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. But none of these three assemblies will have any fellowship with the others. Each views the other two as being in error. Now, no person can believe that the Holy Spirit conducts three conflicting meetings in the same little town. Nor can anyone believe that the Holy Spirit is thus influencing one man against another. We have no reason to doubt the earnestness or honesty of the people who are conducting any or all of these gatherings, but that there is delusion there no one can doubt. Now none of these gathers gives us any more evidence of being directly guided than the others do. Each gives the same evidence, as far as direct guidance is concerned. You cannot believe all, and having the same evidence for each you can only doubt all; and when you do so, the whole three join in saying that you do not believe in the work of the Holy Spirit, which is not creditable to them nor fair to us.

### ***That He causes men to bear false witness***

I will only call attention to another quarter from which this mistaken notion about us issues. There are a number of evangelists, chiefly belonging to the "Brethren" referred to, who claim to be

called and sent by the Holy Spirit. These men claim that the Holy Spirit tells them where to go, what to say, and when to move again. Now, I know for certain that a number of these men will not tell the truth about us as a people, nor will they hold their tongues about us. I am informed that you had one of these men in this town (Fraserburgh) last Lord's day. He was advising his hearers not to come to these meetings that we are conducting because we do not believe in the blood of Christ. I am sure, my friends, that you do not expect us to believe that the Holy Spirit is guiding a man through this country for the purpose of bearing false witness against his neighbors. When we speak out against such things or seek to put them to the proof, these men are guided past apologizing for their wrong-doing, and they and those they can influence proceed to blame us for not believing in the work of the Holy Spirit. If we are sinners in regard to this great question we do not know it; but that we are seriously sinned against, by those whose pretensions to piety should lead us to at least expect justice from them, is beyond all doubt.

### **Only one way out of Confusion**

There is only one road out of all this confusion, which is this - let everything be tested by the Word of God. Where it speaks clearly let us stand fast; in things it leaves doubtful, let every one be free; where it is entirely silent, let us be the same. To walk by this rule is safe, modest, and reasonable, and will be productive of peace, piety, and edification. I know of no other rule that can have the same result.

### **An Earnest Appeal**

I have spoken without bitterness and without fear upon this important subject to this large audience. I have spoken as in the presence of Him to Whom I must give an account. I have spoken as unto wise men - judge ye what I have said; and judge by the Word of God, for by that standard you yourselves will be judged.