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Fred. G. Usilton. - - Wm. B. Usilton, Jr.

THE HOLY GHOST.

Sunday Discourse by Dr. Chapman, the Noted Pastor Evangelist.

Shows How the Holy Ghost is the Christian Helper Beyond All Others—Is the Life of the Church.

NEW YORK CITY. — The sermon here furnished to the press is the most impressive one of a series which the Rev. Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman prepared some time ago for the Bible Institute Colportage Association. It is entitled "The Holy Ghost in His Relation to the Church," and was preached from the text: "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Acts 2: 47.

In the honest endeavor which we make properly to live the Christian life and in the end receive a reward from the hand of the Master, thereby not missing our crown, the Holy Ghost beyond all others is our helper. He is certainly to be counted as the director and leader of our church life. We need expect no great outpouring of the Holy Ghost so long as His leadership is ignored, and without this high spiritual atmosphere we may expect, as individuals, no special victories.

On the day of Pentecost two great events occurred: the first was the exaltation of Jesus Christ at the right hand of the Father—"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses" (Acts 2: 32); the other was the outpouring of the Spirit, because Jesus had been raised up and exalted. The point is that Christ as our head had poured out upon Him the Holy Ghost; thus receiving Him in trust for the body; and it naturally follows that what the head has received the members of the body have a right to claim. Since that day, in the plan of God, the Holy Ghost has been the administrator of the affairs of the church, and He is here to make Christ real to every believer. If He had tarried with us in the flesh and I had claimed His presence, He would have been denied to you; but now that He is present in the Spirit, we may all have Him and lay claim to His presence, and the love of God may be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. He is in a real sense the vicar of Christ, and there can be no other. The Son of God is to-day at the right hand of God, representing the church, and the Spirit of God ought to be enthroned and exalted in the church, representing the risen Christ. He is to counsel her, to guide her and to control her—in a word, He is to govern all things in the church, from the least things unto the greatest.

The Scriptures are evidence that He has a message for the church. It is generally believed that the epistles to the seven churches in the Revelation contain the prophetic setting forth of the church's history—its declines and recoveries, its failures and returns, and it is believed by many that we have come to the Laodicean period of history of the last days of the church. Seven times we have the expression repeated: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

It is to be noted that this expression is used after each of the churches had backslidden. Ephesus had left her first love; Smyrna was rich, and likely to be proud; Pergamos was touched with the doctrine of Balaam; Thyatira was influenced by Jezebel; Sardis had a name to live, and was dead; Philadelphia had but little strength, while Laodicea was neither hot nor cold. The real cure for backsliding in the church is that which comes to us by the Holy Ghost of the revelation of God's will and the interpretation of God's word.

I.

The church is a called-out body. We were chosen in Him before the world's foundation, and we are elect according to the foreknowledge of God, for thus saith the Scripture. Jesus is in heaven directing the work of the church, but the Holy Ghost is here carrying out the plan. This plan extends to the minutest details of the life of the church. He has ordained the offices we must have, and the kind of men we must lay hold upon to fill them: "Wherefore He saith, when He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Ephesians 4: 8, 11, 12. The church is really the habitation of God. Hear what the Scriptures have to say: Eph. 2: 19 to 22—"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." If He is dwelling in us, we must be careful of our church life, for we may grieve Him and quench Him by the way we live and work. Many things are done to-day in the church which may commend themselves to men, and yet fall utterly short of the approval of God. As an illustration, Peter, standing up with the 120, spoke of the departure of Judas, and declared that one must be chosen in his stead. Prayer was offered, a vote was taken, and Matthias elected; but there was no indication that this election was ever ratified by the Lord, for Matthias at once sinks out of sight. Two years afterward the Lord calls one to fill the vacancy, namely, Saul of Tarsus. Paul speaks thus of himself: Gal. 1: 1—"Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead."

II.

The church was established by signs and wonders. Acts 2: 1 to 4—"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing, mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Heb. 2: 4—"God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will."

There was no church in the Old Testament. This is the opinion of many Bible teachers. In Acts 2: 41, we read: "Then they that gladly received His word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about 3000 souls." In this text the words "unto them" are written in italics, so that the original is, "there were added about 3000 souls." But we must add to something when we add, so in Acts 2: 47, we read: "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." But there is a still better explanation. In Acts 5: 14, we read: "They were added to the Lord."

This is Paul's conception of the church. Christ is the head and the church is His body. We are being called out now from the Gentile world. Every new soul won for Christ comes in to complete the body. Some day the last man will come in, and the skies will brighten with the return of the Lord.

It is this that gives one the passion for soul-winning. It is this thought that furnishes the inspiration for the foreign missionary. The church is a called-out body, and the missionary is sent to Africa, to China, to Japan, that he may work in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost in leading souls to Christ. God speed the day when the last member of the body shall be found!

III.

The church is enlightened by the Spirit. The Spirit is the breath of God in the body of His church. If His rule is not followed it naturally results that His life is shut out. Thus it comes to be like a man suffering from pneumonia—one unaccustomed to such scenes declares that what the man needs is more air, but in point of fact it is not more air he needs at all, but more lung to be filled with air. We do not want more of the Holy Ghost, but the Holy Ghost ought to have more of the church. And sometimes, because His rule is not followed, He in a measure withdraws Himself, and allows the forms to stay, but the power is departed. The oil is gone, but the lamp is there. There are churches where prayer is offered, and the Bible read, and church-going religiously kept up, and there is positively not even the semblance of power. They are described in the words of Scripture as "having a name to live, but being dead." They remind one of the guard found in the excavated city of Pompeii. He stood with his helmet and his armor on, and his bony finger clasping his spear, and yet not living. It is just the same with the church.

A little thing at first may result in loss of power in the entire church. A wrong financial policy might do it. A spirit of criticism might accomplish it.

"There is an insidious disease which slowly and secretly turns the vital organs of the body to bone. It begins by ossifying little fragments of tissue here and there. No medical skill can arrest its progress. Nature is perverted from her healthy process of assimilating and nutrition to the creation in the system of nothing but bone. What should be life to muscle and nerve and sinew and arteries, turns to solid and lifeless bone. At length the heart is reached and vital parts of it become bone, and its beautiful work of pulsation, by which life is sent in red streams to the very tips of the fingers, ceases and death ensues. Such is the moral induration which the sensibilities of a soul suffer, when long appealed to by the services of religion, to which it will not give back a throb of responsive feeling."

IV.

If the church is to be governed by the Spirit, every office-bearer in the church should be influenced by the Holy Ghost.

Ministers should be filled. Paul gives an illustration of one phase of this truth: Acts 13: 9-12—"Then Saul, (who also is called Paul), filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtility and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness, and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord."

The Holy Ghost only fills the man whose desire is to honor Christ. Philosophy, poetry, art, sociology, ethics, are well enough in their places, but their place is not in the pulpit. The Holy Ghost has pledged Himself to witness only to the story of Jesus and the resurrection. Paul thought this whole thing out, and while he was schooled in all the learning of the day, he said:

"We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto them that are called, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Peter is another illustration: Acts 4: 8—"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them: Ye rulers of the people and elders of Israel." Acts 11: 15, 16—"And as I began to speak the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that He said, John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost."

I do not know of any one in the New Testament Scripture furnishing us a better argument for the use of the word of God in preaching than Peter himself. Take the sermon at Pentecost, if you will. It is simply a string of texts of Scripture. If you should ask, "But is this all he said?" I answer: "The words of Scripture are all that the Holy Ghost thought worthy of record." Peter's words would have passed away with his own generation. The word of God abides forever.

Stephen furnishes an illustration of the fact that to be filled with the Holy Ghost does not always mean human success. Acts 6: 5 to 8—"And the saying pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch; whom they set before the apostles, and when they had prayed they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people." Acts 7: 55—"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God."

One might be filled with the Spirit, and pass through the greatest disappointment of his life, for Stephen was just as truly filled, although he was stoned to death, as Peter, the preacher of Pentecost. God might fill you and then test you. The great guns which are used in the defense of our country are always tested before they leave the arsenal.

The position of the minister is an exalted one. I. Peter 1: 12—"Unto whom it was revealed that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, which things the angels desire to look into."

There is not an angel in the skies to-day but who would leave his post of honor to take your place and mine in the preaching of the gospel. The position is a divine one: Acts 20: 28—"Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood." It greatly dignifies one's work to know that we are here to do just what Jesus would do if He were in our place. The message of the man of God is inspired: Matt. 10: 20—"For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." Mark 13: 10, 11—"And the Gospel must first be published among all nations. But when they shall lead you and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate, but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost." Luke 12: 12—"For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say."

The Holy Ghost never encourages idleness. We are not teaching the lesson that one need simply open his mouth and expect the Lord to fill it: but the ideal position is for everyone to be so filled with the message all the time that if he were called to speak any number of times during the day he would always be sure that he had a message from God. Notice what the Scriptures say: Rev. 1: 10—"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet." Rev. 4: 2—"And immediately I was in the Spirit; and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne." If one is saturated with His message, and is in the Spirit, there will be no question as to his power in the presentation of what he has to say.

These conditions having resulted the results are guaranteed: Mark 16: 15-18—"And He said unto them, 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. And these signs shall follow them that believe: in My name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." Heb. 2: 4—"God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will." There is absolutely no limit to God's power; He can do all things.

There is a very significant expression used in Scripture. Rev. 14: 13—"And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." The Rev. F. B. Meyer thinks that this is to be interpreted as "Amen, saith the Spirit;" and that it is the Spirit's approval of what we have done in the name of Christ. It will be a glad day for the church when for every pastor's work the Spirit shall breathe "Amen;" for the service of every elder, deacon and trustee He shall say again "Amen;" when the living of all the saints shall live so nearly according to God's will that at the close of each day the Spirit shall say "Amen and amen."

But the filling of the Holy Ghost is not to be confined to those who are called ministers of the gospel. Every deacon ought to be filled: Acts 6: 3, 4—"Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

There was a time in the history of the church when men were chosen to fill the church's offices, not because of their social position or their financial ability, but simply because they were men filled with the Holy Ghost; so that there can be but one real test of fitness for such an office. I feel very sure that we should expect a Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit of God only when this principle is recognized.

V.

If the Holy Ghost is the life of the church—as we find in Scripture: Eph. 4: 31, 32—"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice, and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you"—then we are to be exceedingly careful with respect to everything that would grieve Him in the least. It is a new thought to some that the presence of bitterness or wrath or anger would grieve the Spirit. Such is indeed the case.

The Holy Ghost is to work out in us that which Christ has accomplished for us on the throne. There can only be one hindrance to the working out of this plan of God, and that is found in the church itself. There is a solemn warning for all the members of the church: I Thess. 5: 19—"Quench not the Spirit." Acts 5: 3-9—"But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words, fell down, and gave up the ghost, and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out." While men may not nowadays have been stricken down as were Ananias and Sapphira, yet it is true that because of the fact that we are living in a spirit that is contrary to the Holy Ghost, we become dead spiritually, if not physically, and it is a possible thing to so nearly quench the Spirit that from the human standpoint there will be no life at all.

Thus while the individual member of the church may miss his reward and "be saved, yet so as by fire," the same thing may be true of the church as a whole. It would be a sad thing for the Bridegroom to be disappointed in his bride.

Knowing When to Stop.

Knowing when to stop and stopping are very different things. A man in a runaway motor car knows very clearly that it is time to stop, but that doesn't stop him. Many a man or woman has carelessly or wilfully gotten into a bad habit, saying: "Oh! I am one who knows when to stop." That is probably true. The day will come when they will know very clearly that it is time to stop, but will not be able to do so. It is like taking hold of the handles of a strong electrical generator—very easy to take hold, but very hard to let go. The fingers of habit are bent and barbed like fish-hooks; once in, they are hard to get out. The really wise man considers not only when to stop, but also when it is possible to stop, and he often finds, in so considering, that the best time of all to stop is before one has begun to go.—Sunday-School Times.

Fresh From God's Mint.

All that God gives to us day by day is, as it were, a new creation. We never received it before. It never was our need until now. We may have received something like it before, but that was not this, nor could that have filled the place of this. Every day's blessings are to each of us as a special miracle from the hands of the ever loving and the almighty God. As John Bunyan says: "Things that we receive at God's hand come to us as things from the minting house—though old in themselves, yet new to us." What should we do if our Father failed to give us current coin of His minting day by day?—Sunday-School Times.

Both Individual and Social.

The Spirit of God is now proving to us that this individualistic side of Christianity, although always primary and essential is, after all, only a section of the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. This must be so, seeing that the Gospel was for man, who in the nature of him is structurally social. You can insulate a wire because it is a wire, but you cannot insulate a man. The kingdom Christ established was one of the sons of God, and the ideal social order is that in which the principle of brotherhood reigns with illimitable sway.—John Clifford.

The Secret of Success.

Faithfulness is the explanation of many a successful career. Opportunity, ability and the friendly assistance that may be given all tend to further one's efforts, but the persistent, undaunted faithfulness to the labor in hand, in the very face of opposition and hindrance and obstacles, is that which conquers. The character that is developed by devotion to duty, in life's smallest undertakings, is being equipped for glorious achievements. Therein is found the secret of success.—Presbyterian.

Full Faith in Christianity.

One cannot give money or anything else with the same passion with which he gives himself. All other forms of consecration are secondary—valuable, but secondary. No generation, therefore, can show its full faith in Christianity which does not offer its best gifts.—William J. Tucker.

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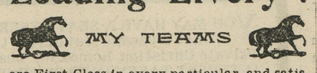

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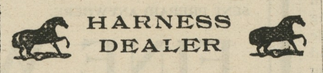

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