

THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT AND THE GIFTS.

ACTS ii. 33-38.

JESUS, as Messiah on earth, was Emmanuel, *i.e.*, God with us; in Christ dead and risen the word testifies how God is *for* us (Rom. viii.); but in this chapter we learn another thing, even God *in* us. This could not be without the shedding of the precious blood of Jesus; but where that was sprinkled, the Holy Spirit could come and dwell.

“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” (it was the Spirit coming down) “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.”

Once before the Spirit had descended on a man on earth (Luke iii. 22, John i. 32-34), but He was the "Son of God." On Him the Spirit descended "in a bodily shape like a dove," the emblem of purity. But Jesus was the only one He could thus come to abide in without blood. At Pentecost, coming to the disciples, He takes another shape, "cloven tongues, like as of fire;" for, in the different tongues to which man of old had been doomed in the just displeasure of God (Gen. xi.), His mercy was now about to visit them. The tongues were "cloven," because the testimony of God's grace should now go out to the Gentile as well as to the Jew. But they were "as of fire" also, for there had been the judgment of sin in the cross, and man's estate was now judged by it. Hence the tongues as of fire was the witness of "grace," here, as everywhere else where sin is concerned, reigning "through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. v. 21).

This unheard-of phenomenon attracted universal attention. Some "were amazed," some "mocked." But Peter said unto them, "this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." No doubt the *fulfilment* in any complete sense, because of Israel's unbelief, awaits another day—"the last days"—when not on the assembled Jews only but on "all flesh" shall the Spirit be poured: but this was the principle of the prophecy—the same which we have to-day in the church.

Now, although in the presence of the Spirit, we have not only the fulfilment of the promise of the Father (Luke xxiv. 49), but also the special assurance

of our Lord accomplished in His baptizing them of the Holy Ghost (John i. 33), the effect of which was "one body" (1 Cor. xii. 13); still the doctrine of the body was as yet wholly unrevealed; nor could it be revealed in the wisdom of God until the Jew had rejected the testimony of His grace and offer of blessing to them (Acts iii. 26). Nevertheless, that which was the power of this one body, that person who alone was adequate to form it, was actually then and there given, though the consequences were as yet unknown to the disciples. For we must remember that while we have the history of the church from Acts ii., it was written at a subsequent date, when the truth about it, as unfolded in the various epistles of the Apostle Paul, had been fully revealed through his ministry.

Again, we find, not only was the Spirit *in* them individually, symbolized by the tongue as of fire resting on each of them, but also His being there *with* them is likewise shown, for He filled the house where they were sitting. In chapter iv., when the house shook where they were, it was because the Spirit made His presence felt in their midst. So also when Ananias and Sapphira lied, it was "not unto men, but unto God," who was now present, dwelling in the church. So likewise in chapter viii. we read, "the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot:" and again in chapter xiii. "the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul," &c., thus showing us how, according to the promise of the Lord (John xiv.-xvi.), the Holy Spirit is now present to effectuate the work of grace, and the glory of Christ on earth (compare also Acts x. 19, xvi. 7).

Now, as to the manner in which the Spirit was conferred, we must distinguish between the presence of the Spirit itself and the external power and signs which accompanied it; because, in the absence of these signs, there would be the danger of overlooking and denying that incomparable gift, which was necessarily always above its effects. Whatever the importance of these signs, they were but the accompanying voucher to man of the gift and presence of the Spirit as a new thing upon the earth. In their largest and richest form we see them on the day of Pentecost, when we are told that Jesus of Nazareth, whom with wicked hands they crucified and slew, "being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear." When they heard this terrible charge of crucifying their Messiah brought home against them, they were pricked to the heart, and in a sort of despair at the consequences of so grievous a sin, cried out, "What shall we do?" Peter says to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"—even as we ourselves have got it. And especially mark the wisdom in using the call here to repent, and not to believe. Not that they could repent without faith, and this too wrought by the Spirit in their souls, but the occasion demanded, in view of their heinous guilt in the rejection of the Lord Jesus, the most uncompromising self-judgment on their part for their past conduct. So, too, at Athens Paul insists on it, that "now God commandeth all men everywhere to repent." On other occasions, both Jews and Gentiles, as in the case of

the Philippian jailer, were invited and urged to believe. The truth is, both faith and repentance are produced in the soul by the Spirit, but there is always an important meaning when one is pressed rather than the other.

What was here needed was the humbling of these proud Jews. Hence, in the goodness of God (Rom. ii. 4), repentance was preached to them for the remission of sins. Grace wrought, and made them receive and endorse God's sentence against themselves. Nor does Peter spare them. He *could* preach "remission of sins," and therefore he *would* preach "repentance"—a thing too often forgotten, to the real hurt of souls; for the greater the sense of the Lord's grace, if there be not also a commensurate sounding of the conscience before God, the greater the danger, and especially for the young.

But he adds, "*and* ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Now it is evident the "gift of the Holy Ghost" here spoken of has nothing whatever to do with the bringing men to believe and repent—as then they would have repented and believed without the operation of the Spirit, which, to the natural man at enmity with God, would be impossible. The truth is that when souls did repent, and when they were baptized in His name, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit as a subsequent privilege. For, while practically this may be on the same occasion as that on which a man believes, and every believer is sealed with the Spirit (Ep. i. 13), still it is never at the same moment, for it is grounded on the fact that we are sons by faith (Gal. iv. 6), believers resting on redemption

in Him : a most important truth, if we would understand what Christianity really is.

Further, the "*gift* of the Holy Ghost" (Acts ii. 38) is never to be confounded with the "*gifts*" (1 Cor. xii. 1). They convey different thoughts ; and different words are in the original used to express them. A man might have the gift and enjoy the presence of the Spirit of God in the heart (2 Cor. i. 22 ; Ep. i. 13) ; he might be gifted by the Spirit as an apostle, prophet, &c. (1 Cor. xii. 11) ; still the "*gift of the Holy Spirit*" is another privilege altogether. It is the Spirit Himself given, and not merely the power with which He invests a person for special purposes—the common blessing then and there conferred on every soul subject to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts v. 32).

We gather the clear distinction between the gift of the Holy Spirit and His working or operation, enabling a soul to repent and believe the gospel, in the mighty work of God's grace in Samaria, through the preaching of Philip (Acts viii). The whole city was filled with joy ; and so strong was the current of blessing that even Simon Magus was impressed with the holy influence, which, though it neither penetrated his conscience nor governed his heart, at least forced him intellectually to bow to the truth of the gospel, and to be baptized with the rest. But still there was no gift of the Holy Spirit to any there, "for as yet he was fallen upon none of them ; only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (verse 16). Nor is the presence of the Spirit to be confounded with the power with which He enabled some to speak with tongues,

others to work miracles, &c. ; because, if this were so, we have in this case no Holy Ghost any longer present, though given to abide with us "for ever" (John xiv. 16), inasmuch as we have no more such outward displays of power. Therefore the Scripture adds, "When the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: for as yet he was fallen upon none of them, only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

And mark the difference in the wisdom and care of God over our souls, in which the Spirit is here given, from the day of Pentecost. There, those who gladly received the word and were baptized straightway received the Spirit: here, in order to put an end to the rivalry of Samaria, and the natural pride which would have turned this fresh grace of God into a support for her religious pretensions, she must wait until two of the apostles come down from Jerusalem. Thus there was no sanction given to independency—the most destructive principle possible to "the unity of the Spirit" on earth.

Accordingly, when they came down, they "prayed for them." But more than this, "they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost." Thus signifying by this imposition of hands the blessing from God through the apostles, and the identification, so to speak, with the work at Jerusalem. It was an attestation before the whole world that God would suffer no such thing as rivalry in His church—that those who

were the heads of the work in Jerusalem were quite as indispensable in Samaria.

In Acts x. we have a third variety. The Spirit of God is working with Cornelius, while chastening his soul in fasting and praying (verse 30), in one place, while in another He is preparing Peter, by removing from him his Jewish prejudices, to be the messenger of grace to the Gentiles also; teaching him "that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." Evidently Cornelius was no pagan idolator. He was not an unconverted soul, but a devout man, who feared God, and abounded in prayer and almsgiving. His public character was that of "a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews" (verse 22). No doubt this state was the work of God's Spirit; but the point here was not the awakening a soul for the first time, but rather setting one, already born of God, on a known ground of relationship with God in perfect liberty, so that none who feared God and His word could gainsay his title.

Knowing, as Peter says (verse 37), the word that was published throughout all *Judæa*, beginning from Galilee, his very reverence for God would prevent his anticipating His ways till now His messenger tells him (verse 43) that "*whosoever* believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." And thereupon, the truth entering into his soul, "while Peter spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word;" and this too without any of the preliminaries necessarily set forth on the day of Pentecost and at Samaria. Thus, by the fulness of His mercy, accompanied too with such

a signal seal of His approval as could not be gainsayed, whatever astonishment it might cause (verse 45-47), did God rebuke the slow-heartedness of Peter that needed the threefold repetition of the vision (verse 16), and the objections of others at Jerusalem who were not at first prepared for such grace (Acts xi. 2-18). Baptism followed, as a privilege which could not be denied them. It is thus that we now who are Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit (Ep. i. 13): not through the intervention of apostles or ordinances, but in the sovereign grace of God, through His preached word received by faith in our hearts.

Sometimes there may be delay. There may be a real work of grace in the heart and conscience, and yet a person may have no peace—no settled rest and liberty in the Saviour. We must not therefore rashly discredit the work of God, which will surely be perfected in due time. On the other hand, we must not rest satisfied because a person is truly penitent and looks to Christ, unless he be brought into liberty (Rom. viii. 16). It would be to stop short of the full presence and operation of the Spirit of God in the soul. Such a one would be truly *converted*, but still very far short of the blessing that Scripture recognises as the true Christian state before God. A converted soul under the bondage of the law (Rom. vii.) is no doubt *renewed*; but Scripture (Rom. viii.) sets before the Christian a place of blessing where doubts and fears melt away in the sense of this grace that has brought us nigh to God as children, crying, “Abba, Father;” and nothing short of this is salvation (Acts xii. 14, xiii. 26).

Nor are the Old Testament saints a pattern for us in

this matter. Deliverance through the finished work of Christ had not been set before them; and they could not anticipate God's ways. But now salvation is come. Christ has been here and died and rose; yet still quickened souls do not always apprehend the mighty results in a day. It may be of course; as in the Philippian jailer, who in the same hour was made by divine grace as happy as he had before been miserable: though I am far from thinking this is so common a thing as many suppose.

Take the Apostle Paul for instance. He had seen the Lord in glory; but he was three days in profound though wholesome conflict, before he found rest and liberty. And so with many: it is not until after a similar process, often for a length of time, they are brought to rest in Christ. When one enters into liberty, there is, in my judgment, not only life, but the reception of the Holy Spirit. But it is certain that wherever God does begin the work He always finishes it, though not always, if ever, at the same time. No doubt the cause of the delay is to be traced in many to the natural insubjection of the heart to God, and the refusal to submit to His righteousness (Rom. x. 4).

Another case is recorded in Acts xix. 1-6, where "Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost," or rather, "whether the Holy Ghost be [come];" for they were not ignorant of His existence, as at first sight it might seem. The Old Testament spoke abundantly

of His existence, and the promise that He should be poured out in the last days; and John the Baptist most surely bore witness to Christ, as the One who should baptize them with the Holy Ghost (Luke iii. 16). But as yet they were ignorant of this promise being now in the course of fulfilment. Nor was it a question of their faith: the apostle does not doubt it; though evidently he had remarked some restlessness or want of ease or other such trait about them that made him ask the question. And this was easily accounted for; for they knew no more than John's baptism, which did not go farther than repentance—that self-judgment produced by the Spirit whereby man's moral ruin is detected in God's sight. An accomplished redemption, connecting the ransomed and delivered soul with Him who has triumphed over sin and its effects, the groundwork of the indwelling of the Spirit in the believer, could not yet be preached. But he could point to Him that was to come—that is, to Christ: “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied.” Thus did God put honour on Peter and John at Samaria—the religious rival of Jerusalem; while Paul lays his hands, not on Gentiles converted through his preaching, but on disciples already baptized with John's baptism.

Moreover, it is evident that the laying on of the apostle's hands in order to receiving the Holy Spirit is exceptional to the chief occasions (as Acts ii. and x. &c.), where it is certain no such act was done by the apostles. Thus, even if apostles did exist, they are

not needed to lay hands on us in order that we may receive the Holy Spirit. Believing on Christ through their word, we have shared the blessing, even as our prototypes at Cæsarea.

The Lord be praised, not only for His Spirit, but for the written word, which makes all things clear for the simple. May we hold fast according to the faith of God's elect, the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie promised before the world began.—*Abridged, with permission of the author, from "Kelly's Lectures on the Holy Spirit."*

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