

XIII. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND PRAYER

During the great Welsh Revival a minister was said to be very successful in winning souls by one sermon that he preached--hundreds were converted. Far away in a valley news reached a brother minister of the marvelous success of this sermon. He desired to find out the secret of the man's great success.--He walked the long way, and came to the minister's poor cottage, and the first thing he said was: "Brother, where did you get that sermon?" He was taken into a poorly furnished room and pointed to a spot where the carpet was worn threadbare, near a window that looked out upon the everlasting hills and solemn mountains and said, "Brother, there is where I got that sermon. My heart was heavy for men. One night I knelt there--and cried for power as I never preached before. The hours passed until midnight struck, and the stars looked down on a sleeping world, but the answer came not. I prayed on until I saw a faint streak of grey shoot up, then it war silver--silver became purple and gold. Then the sermon came and the power came and men fell under the influence of the Holy Spirit."--G. H. Morgan

The Gospel without the Holy Spirit would be vain and nugatory. The gift of the Holy Spirit was vital to the work of Jesus Christ in the atonement. As Jesus did not begin His work on earth till He was anointed by the Holy Spirit, so the same Holy Spirit is necessary to carry forward and make effective the atoning work of the Son of God. As His anointing by the Holy Ghost at His baptism was an era in His life, so also is the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost a great era in the work of redemption in making effective the work of Christ's Church.

The Holy Spirit is not only the bright lamp of the Christian Dispensation, its Teacher and Guide, but is the Divine Helper.

He is the enabling agent in God's new dispensation of doing. As the pilot takes his stand at the wheel to guide the vessel, so the Holy Ghost takes up His abode in the heart to guide and empower all its efforts. The Holy Ghost executes the whole gospel through the man by His presence and control of the spirit of the man.

In the execution of the atoning work of Jesus Christ, in its general and more comprehensive operation, or in its minute and personal application, the Holy Spirit is the one efficient Agent, absolute and indispensable.

The gospel cannot be executed but by the Holy Ghost. He only has the regal authority to do this royal work. Intellect cannot execute it, neither can learning, nor eloquence, nor truth, not even the revealed truth can execute the gospel. The marvelous facts of Christ's life told by hearts unanointed by the Holy Spirit will be dry and sterile, or "like a story told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Not even the precious blood can execute the gospel. Not any, nor all of these, though spoken with angelic wisdom, angelic eloquence, can execute the gospel with saving power. Only tongues set on fire by the Holy Spirit can witness the saving power of Christ with power to save others.

No one dared move from Jerusalem to proclaim or utter the message along its streets to the dying multitudes till the Holy Spirit came in baptismal power. John could not utter a word, though he had pillow'd his head on Christ's bosom and caught the pulsations of Christ's heart, and though his brain was full of the wondrous facts of that life and of

the wondrous words which fell from His lips. John must wait till a fuller and richer endowment than all of these came on him. Mary could not live over that Christ-life in the home of John, though she had nurtured the Christ and stored heart and mind full of holy and motherly memories, till she was empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The coming of the Holy Spirit is dependent upon prayer, for prayer only can compass with its authority and demands, the realm where this Person of the Godhead has His abode. Even Christ was subject to this law of prayer. With Him, it is, it ever has been, and ever will be, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." To His disconsolate disciples, He said, "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter." This law of prayer for the Holy Spirit presses on the Master and on the disciples as well. Of so many of God's children it may truly be said, "Ye have Him not because ye ask not." And of many others it might be said, "Ye have Him in faint measure because ye pray for Him in faint measure."

The Holy Spirit is the spirit of all grace and of each grace as well. Purity, power, holiness, faith, love, joy and all grace are brought into being and perfected by Him. Would we grow in grace in particular? Would we be perfect in all graces? We must seek the Holy Spirit by prayer.

We urge the seeking of the Holy Spirit. We need Him, and we need to stir ourselves up to seek Him. The measure we receive of Him will be gauged by the fervour of faith and prayer with which we seek Him. Our ability to work for God, and to pray to God, and live for God, and affect others for God, will be dependent on the measure of the Holy Spirit received by us, dwelling in us, and working through us.

Christ lays down the clear and explicit law of prayer in this regard for all of God's children. The world needs the Holy Spirit to convict it of sin and of righteousness and judgment to come and to make it feel its guiltiness in God's sight. And this spirit of conviction on sinners comes in answer to the prayers of God's people. God's children need Him more and more, need His life, His more abundant life, His super-abundant life. But that life begins and ever increases as the child of God prays for the Holy Spirit. "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" This is the law, a condition brightened by a promise and sweetened by a relationship.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is one of the benefits flowing to us from the glorious presence of Christ at the right hand of God, and this gift of the Holy Spirit, together with all the other gifts of the enthroned Christ, are secured to us by prayer, as the condition. The Bible by express statement, as well as by its general principles and clear and constant intimations, teaches us that the gift of the Holy Spirit is connected with and conditioned in prayer. That the Holy Spirit is in the world as God is in the world, is true. That the Holy Spirit is in the world as Christ is in the world is also true. And it is also true that there is nothing predicated of Him being in us and in the world that is not predicated of God and Christ being in us, and in the world. The Holy Spirit was in the world in measure before Pentecost, and in the measure of His operation then He was prayed for and sought for, and the principles are unchanged. The truth is, if we cannot pray for the Holy Spirit we cannot pray for any good thing from God, for He is the

sum of all good to us. The truth is we seek after the Holy Spirit just as we seek after God, just as we seek after Christ, with strong cryings and tears, and we are to seek always for more and more of His gifts, and power, and grace. The truth is, that the presence and power of the Holy Spirit at any given meeting is conditioned on praying faith.

Christ lays down the doctrine that the reception of the Holy Spirit is conditioned on prayer, and He Himself illustrated this universal law, for when the Holy Spirit came upon Him at His baptism, He was praying. The Apostolic Church in action illustrates the same great truth.

A few days after Pentecost the disciples were in an agony of prayer, "and when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." This incident destroys every theory which denies prayer as the condition of the coming and recoming of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost, and confirms the view that Pentecost as the result of a long struggle of prayer is illustrative and confirmatory that God's great and most precious gifts and conditioned on asking, seeking, knocking, prayer, ardent, importunate prayer.

The same truth comes to the front very prominently in Philip's revival at Samaria. Though filled with joy by believing in Christ, and though received into the Church by water baptism, they did not receive the Holy Spirit till Peter and John went down there and prayed with and for them.

Paul's praying was God's proof to Ananias that Paul was in a state which conditioned him to receive the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not only our Teacher, our Inspirer and our Revealer, in prayer, but the power of our praying in measure and force is measured by the Spirit's power working in us, as the will and work of God, according to God's good pleasure. In Ephes. 3, after the marvelous prayer of Paul for the Church, he seemed to be apprehensive that they would think he had gone beyond the ability of God in his large asking. And so he closes his appeal for them with the words, that God was able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. The power of God to do for us was measured by the power of God in us. "According to," says the Apostle, that is, after the measure of, "the power that worketh in us." The projecting power of praying outwardly was the projecting power of God in us. The feeble operation of God in us brings feeble praying. The mightiest operation of God in us brings the mightiest praying. The secret of prayerlessness is the absence of the work of the Holy Spirit in us. The secret of feeble praying everywhere is the lack of God's Spirit in His mightiness.

The ability of God to answer and work through our prayers is measured by the Divine energy that God has been enabled to put in us by the Holy Spirit. The projecting power of praying is the measure of the Holy Spirit in us. So the statement of James in the fifth chapter of his Epistle is to this effect:

"The fervent effectual prayer of a righteous man availeth much." The prayer inwrought in the heart by the almighty energy of the Holy Spirit works mightily in its results just as Elijah's prayer did.

Would we pray efficiently and mightily? Then the Holy Spirit must work in us efficiently and mightily. Paul makes the principle of universal

application. "Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." All labour for Christ which does not spring from the Holy Spirit working in us, is nugatory and vain. Our prayers and activities are so feeble and resultless, because He has not worked in us and cannot work in us His glorious work. Would you pray with mighty results? Seek the mighty workings of the Holy Spirit in your own spirit.

Here we have the initial lesson in prayer for the Holy Spirit which was to enlarge to its full fruitage in Pentecost. It is to be noted that in John 14:16, where Jesus engages to pray the Father to send another Comforter, who would dwell with His disciples and be in them, that this is not a prayer that the Holy Spirit might do His work in making us children of God by regeneration, but it was for that fuller grace and power and Person of the Holy Spirit which we can claim by virtue of our relation as children of God. His work in us to make us the children of God and His Person abiding with us and in us, as children of God, are entirely different stages of the same Spirit in His relation to us. In this latter work, His gifts and works are greater, and His presence, even Himself, is greater than His works or gifts. His work in us prepares us for Himself. His gifts are the dispensations of His presence. He puts and makes us members of the body of Christ by His work. He keeps us in that body by His Presence and Person. He enables us to discharge the functions as members of that body by His gifts.

The whole lesson culminates in asking for the Holy Spirit as the great objective point of all praying. In the direction in the Sermon on the Mount, we have the very plain and definite promise, "If ye, being evil, []know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father in Heaven give good things to them that ask him?" In Luke we have "good things" substituted by "the Holy Spirit." All good is comprehended in the Holy Spirit and He is the sum and climax of all good things.

How complex, confusing and involved is many a human direction about obtaining the gift of the Holy Spirit as the abiding Comforter, our Sanctifier and the one who empowers us! How simple and direct is our Lord's direction--ASK! This is plain and direct. Ask with urgency, ask without fainting. Ask, seek, knock, till He comes. Your Heavenly Father will surely send Him if you ask for Him. Wait in the Lord for the Holy Spirit. It is the child waiting, asking, urging and praying perseveringly for the Father's greatest gift and for the child's greatest need, the Holy Spirit.

How are we to obtain the Holy Spirit so freely promised to those who seek Him believably? Wait, press, and persevere with all the calmness and with all the ardour of a faith which knows no fear, which allows no doubt, a faith which staggers not at the promise through unbelief, a faith which in its darkest and most depressed hours against hope believes in hope, which is brightened by hope and strengthened by hope, and which is saved by hope.

Wait and pray--here is the key which unlocks every castle of despair, and which opens' every treasure-store of God. It is the simplicity of the child's asking of the Father, who gives with a largeness, liberality, and cheerfulness, infinitely above everything ever known to earthly parents. Ask for the Holy Spirit--seek for the Holy Spirit--knock for the Holy Spirit. He is the Father's greatest gift for the child's greatest need.

In these three words, "ask," "seek" and "knock," given us by Christ, we have the repetition of the advancing steps of insistence and effort. He is laying Himself out in command and promise in the strongest way, showing us that if we will lay ourselves out in prayer and will persevere, rising to higher and stronger attitudes and sinking to deeper depths of intensity and effort, that the answer must inevitably come. So that it is true the stars would fail to shine before the asking, the seeking and the knocking would fail to obtain what is needed and desired.

There is no elect company here, only the election of undismayed, importunate, never-fainting effort in prayer: "For to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." Nothing can be stronger than this declaration assuring us of the answer unless it be the promise upon which it is based, "And I say unto you, ask and it shall be given you."