

## The Authority of the Holy Spirit

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I WOULD remind you first of all that, from a practical standpoint, this third division of our study of the subject of authority is the most important of all. Notice that I say from a *practical* standpoint. This is because all that we have been considering up to this point may be of no value to us unless we know and experience the authority of the Holy Spirit. We can study the authority of the Lord and of the Scriptures in a purely intellectual manner. We may have intellectual convictions. But they do not of necessity affect our lives and our work. Only when the authority of the Holy Spirit comes to bear upon us do all these things become real and living and powerful to us. More than that, all that we believe about the Scriptures and about the Lord Himself can only be applied in our ministry, and so become relevant to the world and its situation, as we are under the authority and power of the Holy Spirit. So from the practical standpoint there is no question but that this is the most important matter of all.

In the second place, there is often a conflict in the minds of people between the authority of the Scriptures and the authority of the Holy Spirit. How this comes about is an aspect that in itself merits careful and prolonged treatment, but we cannot linger on it because our concern at the moment is to deal with something else. I would just remind you in passing that in the seventeenth century this conflict became acute among the Puritans and divided them into two main groups. Those who asserted that nothing mattered except the authority of the Spirit became known as the Society of Friends (or 'Quakers'). They said that nothing mattered but the 'Inner Light', the inner witness, the inner experience, and an inner power. They also tended to depreciate the Scriptures, some of them going so far as to say that the Scriptures were not even necessary at all. That attitude naturally provoked a reaction in the other party who tended perhaps to depreciate somewhat the place, influence and authority of the Spirit and to emphasize exclusively the authority of the Scriptures.

Now this, surely, is a thoroughly artificial and false antithesis. Believing as we do, and as we have seen, that it is the Holy Spirit Himself who inspired and guided men to write the Scriptures, it should be clear to us that it is obviously His intention that the Scriptures should be used. But more than that, the Scriptures exhort us to search, to examine and 'to test the spirits'. Unfortunately there are evil spirits as well as the Holy Spirit in the world. Furthermore, these evil spirits are ever attacking us and trying to influence us. 'We wrestle not against flesh and blood,' says the apostle, 'but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against

spiritual wickedness in high places' (Ephesians Vi. 12). These spirits would delude us, and would lead us into error. So the only way by which we can examine and test the spirits, and also ourselves, is by the Word. The Bible suggests, therefore, that the Holy Spirit normally speaks to us through the Word. He takes His own Word, He illumines it, and takes our minds and enlightens them, and we are thus made receptive to the Word. Through such a process we are able to check all the experiences that we may have, so that we may be sure that we are not being led astray or deluded. It is not right, therefore, to speak of the Spirit *or* the Word, but rather of the Spirit *and* the Word, and especially the Spirit *through* the Word. This antithesis which tends to be perpetuated in some quarters even today, is one which we must refuse to entertain.

A third consideration which emphasizes the importance of our subject is that, of all the aspects of this question of authority, there is none which is so neglected today as the authority of the Spirit. A great deal of attention is given to the Person of our Lord and His authority. There is certainly great interest in the Scriptures and in their authority. But how much do we bear, comparatively speaking, about the Holy Spirit and His authority? If I were to hazard an opinion I would say that no aspect of the Christian faith has been so tragically neglected and perhaps misunderstood. Why is that? It is important that we should ask that question, because as we come to answer it we shall be forced to examine ourselves. Here, I truly believe, we are dealing with the main source of weakness in modern Evangelicalism.

What, then, are the reasons for this neglect? I think that one is respectability and our great concern about 'dignity'. That is the fatal word which, it seems to me, came in somewhere about the middle of the nineteenth century. The fathers of that generation had been born in an atmosphere of great religious awakenings and revivals. They were men who were alive to the movements of the Spirit. They were not very much concerned about themselves, or their dignity, or their position. But toward the middle of the last century this other idea came in, and men began to talk about the need of a 'dignified' service. So they began to put their emphasis more upon the intellectual equipment and training of the minister than upon his conversion, his being filled with the Spirit, and his consequent spiritual insight and authority. This was done in order that we might have a 'dignified' form of service. One result was that the Church began to pay more and more attention to forms and ceremonies.

At the same time, a kind of pride of learning and of knowledge began to creep in. As popular education spread, people said that the Church needed a more educated ministry. It was argued that people who were going to primary and secondary schools and to universities would no longer be content with the old kind of preaching. All this comes under the general heading of 'respectability', and it undoubtedly had the effect of 'quenching the spirit'. The desire for a cultured, educated ministry is of course right, but not simply as an end in itself, and *never* at the expense of the spiritual element.

That is one explanation of the neglect of this subject. Another, which is closely related to it, is our fear of 'enthusiasm'. There has been a horror of excesses. We hear of various sects and denominations which put a great deal of emphasis upon the work and

ministry of the Spirit, but we add at once, 'Look at their excesses. Look at the things they do. Look at their lack of control.' Many have become so horrified at the thought of excesses and have allowed themselves to be driven so far to the other extreme, that they are undoubtedly guilty of quenching and grieving the Spirit.

Yet this charge of enthusiasm has ever been brought against Evangelicals. It was brought against George Whitefield, John Wesley and their coadjutors two hundred years ago. They were continually being charged by bishops and others with being 'enthusiasts'. However, it did not concern those men, nor frighten them. But the modern Christian, the modern Evangelical, seems horrified and terrified of this charge, as if there were something inherently wrong in a Christian's being really roused and, at times, almost taken out of himself and his own control. Far be it from me to attempt to defend excesses or fanaticism, but I am certain that our danger today is to be so afraid of such things as to be guilty of quenching the Spirit. In the last analysis, of course, it all comes back to the question of pride. We are so concerned about ourselves and our self-importance that we are almost afraid to allow the Holy Spirit to gain control, lest we find ourselves doing something or saying something, or appearing in a guise which does not accord fully with our ideas of what befits the modern educated, sophisticated individual.

### **THE CHURCH'S ATTEMPTS TO RECAPTURE AUTHORITY**

There is no doubt at all that a study of this subject is the Church's greatest need at present. The Church today, however, as the Church has frequently tended to do in former times, seems to be neglecting this, and is seeking its source of authority anywhere but here. She is aware of the fact that she is more or less impotent, that she is not making the impact which she should upon the world. She is conscious that what she lacks is real authority. But in her search for it, she seems to do everything except turn to the authority of the Holy Spirit.

In behaving thus, the Church today is repeating almost exactly her experiences in previous centuries. If you go back to the history of the Church at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, you will find that people had become aware of the fact that Christianity was losing its influence. The rationalists of the late seventeenth, and the deists of the early eighteenth century were delivering their lectures and writing their books. The Church seemed to be quite helpless. So a number of Christians met together and asked each other, 'What can we do to reassert the authority of the Church and of the truth?' They decided that the best plan would be to found a new lectureship. They therefore established what are called the Boyle Lectures, which are still annually given. What was the object of these lectures? It was simply to defend the Christian faith, to produce a system of arguments and apologetics in defence of the faith. Then, during the same era, that outstanding man with a great intellect, Bishop Butler, working along the same lines and in agreement with this approach, wrote his famous *Analogy of Religion*.

What was all this activity intended to do? They were endeavouring to restore the authority of the Bible and the gospel, and to establish the Christian faith rationally. 'We must do something to get back the old authority', they said. So they did it in that way. They produced the apologetics of their day. Yet as we know full well by now, it was not the Boyle Lectures or the works of Bishop Butler that re-established the position of the Church and restored her old authority. What was it? It was God acting through the Holy Spirit in the persons of George Whitefield and John Wesley in Britain and others such as Jonathan Edwards and the Tennents in America. It was the mighty evangelical revival of the eighteenth century. What the excellent Boyle Lectures and the works of Bishop Butler failed completely to do, God Himself brought about in His own way.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Church felt once more the same loss of power. The influence of the evangelical revival had more or less begun to wane. Other new factors had come in and the Church counted but little. She seemed again to have lost her authority; she had no influence over the common people. 'What can be done', the Church asked, 'to restore Christian authority?' A number of very able and learned men such as Keble, Newman and Pusey met in Oxford and resolved that they must give more authority to the preacher. How could they do this? They decided that the only way was to remove the preacher further from the people. They felt that he had been too near to the ordinary Church member and that they must invest him with a new aura of authority. That was the reasoning behind the origin of Anglo-Catholicism, and of all the other revivals of Catholicism which fall short of strict Roman Catholicism. They suggested that the preacher should dress in a different manner. So they put vestments upon him. They took him further away from the actual physical presence of the people. They pushed him back, as it were, into the chancel, and nearer to what they called the 'altar'. They elevated the altar itself and tried to invest that part of the church building with a new dignity. They argued that, as a result, people would come and listen in fear and trembling and with a greater readiness to respond. That was the idea behind it all. It was all part of the search for authority, and, as you know, there were many who actually went over into the Church of Rome because they felt that she alone could really guarantee this kind of authority.

At the same time, as we have already noted, there were those who believed that learning and knowledge, a better training and a critical literary, historical, and scientific approach to the Bible would again restore the lost authority to the Church. But we are all familiar with the facts. What really gave the Church new authority in the nineteenth century was none of these things. It came eventually through that revival which broke out in America in 1857, and in Ulster, Wales and other parts of the world in 1858 and 1859. This was a spiritual revival, a great evangelical renewal once more. It was God again acting and intervening in the power of the Spirit that really restored the authority, and not the attempts of men.

When we consider the situation today we find that the Church in general is repeating the behaviour of the two previous centuries and is re-introducing the makeshifts which have been adopted so often throughout her long history. Everybody today is concerned about

this matter of authority. The questions asked are 'Why cannot we touch those masses which are outside? How can we establish contact? How can we make them listen to us? What can we do to give the Church authority in her preaching and in her pronouncements?' But observe the ways in which many are trying to deal with the situation. They are saying, 'The main trouble is, of course, that the Church has not kept abreast of the times. She is not advertising herself as she should. Great businesses succeed by means of advertising.' So the larger denominations have set up publicity departments. They have publicity offices, and they see that appropriate paragraphs are placed regularly in the newspapers. 'Put it before the people and the people will begin to listen' is the slogan. They cling to the authority of the big voice and the big advertisement.

Others say, 'No, that is not the way. What we need is a social concern. The people after all are interested in material things and in social problems. The Church, therefore, must come down and show that she is taking a greater interest in such matters, and she must speak much more about political and social questions, and then the people will begin to pay attention and listen to our message.' Others advocate that the only way to regain the authority is to make much greater use of sound radio and television. 'Here is a great instrument and a great source of power', they say. 'The Church must buy it up. Pour money into this. Let us make use of this great medium of advertising and of propaganda.' Yet others put their faith in the production of books and literature.

Coupled with all this, of course, is the whole idea of learning and knowledge. Many feel that if we can but show that the modern Christian knows all about science, that he is not just a fool and an enthusiast, but that he really is very reasonable, intellectual and scientific, then the world will be more ready to listen to him. Such is the usual motive behind the many books designed to reconcile science and religion. Those are the basic arguments. But, of course, behind them all, and more important, we are told, than all the others put together, is the need for unity and for a great world Church organization. The real trouble, we are being constantly informed, is that the forces of Christianity are divided. The ungodly world is one, and here is the Church divided into a series of fragments. How can we possibly speak with authority in such a situation? They say that there is only one thing to do. 'We must have a great world Church. If only we could become one and face the world' together, it would then have to listen. That is the secret of authority.'

In saying all this, I am not describing only those Sections of the Church that are not evangelical. I am, unfortunately, speaking of Evangelicalism also. It seems to me that we ourselves have fallen into the same error. We often quote, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord,' and yet in practice we seem to rely upon the 'mighty dollar' and the 'power of the press' and advertising. We seem to think that our influence will depend on our technique and the programme we can put forward, and that it will be the numbers, the largeness, the bigness, that will prove effective! We seem to have forgotten that God has done most of His deeds in the Church throughout its history through 'remnants'. We seem to have forgotten the great story of Gideon, for instance, and how God insisted on reducing the thirty-two thousand men down to three hundred,

before He would make use of them. We have become fascinated by the idea of bigness, and we are quite convinced that if we can only 'stage' (yes, that is the word!) something really big before the world, we will shake it, and produce a mighty religious awakening. That seems to be the modern conception of authority.

All that, I suggest, is nothing but the old error into which the Church has fallen so repeatedly. For Hegel's dictum about history is as true of the Church as it is of the world 'History teaches us that history teaches us nothing.' We seem determined to go on repeating in this way the same errors, and falling into the same pitfalls as our forefathers have ever done. All that brings us back to this, that the Bible teaches plainly and clearly that God's own method is always through the Spirit and His authority and power. What we need to do then, above everything else, is to study this subject — the authority of the Holy Spirit.

### **THE AUTHORITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE LIFE OF OUR LORD**

How is this authority manifested? We have already seen one way in our study of the authority of the Scriptures. But now we must come to the way in which we see the authority of the Holy Spirit demonstrated in the earthly life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is, of course, a most important aspect of our subject. We remember how He was baptized at the very beginning of His ministry at the age of thirty. He went to John the Baptist and asked John to baptize Him. John remonstrated with Him and pointed out that it should rather be he (John) who should be baptized by Him, but our Lord replied: 'Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.' It was at this point in His life, when He was baptized by John, that the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove, and the voice from heaven declared, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

Now this is something unique. Our Lord was being filled by the Holy Spirit in order that He might exercise His ministry as the Messiah. Let us notice how this is put in John iii. 34, 'God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.' God gave Him the Spirit in complete fullness for His task. This is a mystery, but it seems clear that even the Son of God (for the purposes of His mediatorial work on earth) could not have done the work that had been given Him to do unless the Father had thus 'given' Him the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ was still the eternal second Person in the blessed Holy Trinity, but He had laid aside the insignia of His glory. He had humbled Himself, and He had come on earth to live as a man. That is why He had to pray, and that is why it was essential that He should thus receive the plenitude of the Spirit. The Spirit was not given 'by measure' unto Him.

He made this very point Himself. The leaders of the Jews were arguing with Him about His authority and His power. They were rather impressed by His feeding of the five thousand by means of a miracle, but they misunderstood its significance. Our Lord said to them: 'Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father

sealed' (John vi. 27). This is a reference to what had happened there at His baptism. 'Sealing' is always 'with the Holy Spirit'. The Lord Jesus Christ was saying in effect, 'Here is My authority. My Father authenticated Me when He sent the Spirit upon Me and the Voice spoke. I have been sealed by the Father. Why are you still in doubt about Me? It is not so much the miracles, it is the sealing of the Spirit that authenticates Me.' It was a public proclamation of the fact that He is the Messiah. That is the significant accompaniment at His baptism.

Then, after the baptism, He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil forty days and forty nights. At the close of this period He went back to His home town of Nazareth and there, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath, and began to read out of the book of the prophet Isaiah: 'And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears' (Luke iv. ff.). What is He saying? 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He hath anointed me. Again, let us notice He was anointed at His baptism there in the Jordan. He received that special anointing and authority of the Spirit for His task. As the God-Man, the Son of man, He is given the Holy Spirit in His fullness that He might proceed to preach and to do His work of redemption. The conclusion, again, to which we must come is that even the Son of God could not have done His work if He had not thus received the authority, the anointing, this unction which the Holy Ghost alone can give (see also Acts x. 38).

## **THE AUTHORITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER**

### ***a. The work of the Spirit in conversion***

This is a great subject which could occupy our attention for a long time. I am simply going to give some suggestions. We see, first, the authority of the Holy Spirit even in the initial matter of coming to a belief in the gospel. How often this is clearly described in the Scriptures. Our Lord emphasizes it in His interview with Nicodemus who clearly took the position that this was merely a matter of understanding. He is a master of Israel, but here he is confronted by Someone who clearly has more than he has himself. But he thinks to himself, 'It is only a more advanced stage than that which I have already reached.' So he really went to our Lord to say 'What have I to do in addition to what I am already doing? What do I need in addition to what I have so that I can become like you? You are obviously a teacher sent by God, for no man can do these miracles that you do except God be with him.' He is on the point of saying, 'What do I need *in addition?*' And our Lord turns upon him and says, 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' 'You are all wrong', said our Lord to Nicodemus, in effect. 'What you need is to be born of water and of the Spirit.

There are things which belong to the flesh. There are things which belong to the Spirit. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not (do not try to understand). The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit. You need the illumination and power of the Spirit. You cannot do this thing for yourself.' Our Lord emphatically lays down this principle once and for ever.

You see the same thing in practice in the Acts of the Apostles. The first Christian convert on the continent of Europe according to the record was a woman called Lydia, a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira. How was she converted? Was she carried away by the personality of the apostle Paul? Did he 'put over' his great personality? You remember how he started his campaign in Europe. He went out to a little prayer meeting of women only, outside the city wall on a Sunday afternoon. It was the most inauspicious and unheralded beginning that can ever have taken place. There in the little prayer meeting he just sat down and spake to them the Word of the Lord.

'Still', someone may say, 'it must have been Paul's personality. It must have been his learning, his eloquence.' This is not what the record says. In Acts xvi. 14 we read, 'Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.' Even Paul could not save a soul, mighty man that he was. The Lord the Holy Spirit alone can open the heart and enable us to receive the truth. A specific statement of this fact in I Corinthians xii. 3 should settle this matter, "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.' If you need something further, you need only go to Ephesians ii and there you will find that there is only one hope for those who are 'dead in trespasses and sins', those who are 'the children of wrath' and who walk 'according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience' and are slaves to lusts and passions of the mind as well as of the flesh and the body. There is only one hope for them. 'You hath he quickened.' 'We are his workmanship.' Without the work and authority and power of the Holy Spirit there would never be a single believer in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

### ***b. The work of the Spirit in assurance***

But the authority of the Spirit does not end there. It is the Holy Spirit alone who finally can give us an unshakable assurance of salvation. Now this subject of the assurance of salvation is a very important one, and one, it seems to me, which is very frequently misunderstood. There are three main ways in which assurance comes to us, but often in these days, unfortunately, only the first one is stressed. The first is that which is to be obtained by believing and applying to ourselves the bare word of the Scripture as the authoritative word of God. It tells us that 'he that believeth on him is not condemned'. There is God's word, we believe it and rest upon it.

Yet that is only the first way assurance may come to us. Indeed, that alone can sometimes be dangerous. It can be a kind of 'beliefism'. A man can say that for his own

peace of mind and for his own purposes. We accept that, but alone it is not enough. We need something further, which is the second ground of assurance. The First Epistle of John provides us with certain criteria. John says that there are certain tests of spiritual life.

- i. 'We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.'
- ii. We know again that we have passed from death unto life because we no longer find the commandments of the Lord to be grievous. They are a delight to us. And there are other tests.
- iii. We believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- iv. We are aware of the Spirit working in us.
- v. We examine ourselves to see if any of the Spirit's fruit is being manifested in us. If we find these things, we can be assured that we are born again. Life must always manifest itself. The life in the tree produces the apples or pears or peaches. Life is bound to show itself, and if you find any signs or evidences of life, that is the guarantee that there is the presence of life. That is a much safer form of assurance than the first, which was entirely objective. This is subjective also.

There is yet, however, a further form of assurance. It is the highest and most certain of all. The apostle Paul expresses it in Romans viii. 15-17: 'For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.'

This is not a form of assurance that I may deduce from the Scriptures, or from evidences which I find in myself. Here is a direct witness of the Spirit; the Spirit Himself beareth witness with my spirit. It is possible for us to have the first two grounds of assurance without having this third. Here is something that the Spirit Himself alone can give us. It is He alone who can speak with a final authority which gives me certitude with regard to my being a child of God, a certitude as great, or greater indeed, as my certainty with regard to anything else in life. Such a fact is constantly asserted by the saints throughout the centuries. They declare that the Holy Spirit made them so certain of the reality and presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and His love for them, that they were more certain of that than of any other fact whatsoever.

The same truth is put in other forms elsewhere. In 2 Corinthians i. 22 we find it like this, 'Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.' In Ephesians i. 13, 14 it is put in this form: 'In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.' You will notice that the same word is used as was used concerning our Lord at His baptism — 'sealed'. Here then is the final assurance of salvation, and only the authority of the Holy Spirit can give us this.

### ***c. The work of the Spirit in giving understanding***

It is also the Holy Spirit alone who can give us true spiritual understanding of the Scriptures, an understanding of the doctrine. John puts this clearly (I John ii. 20). He is dealing with the 'anti-Christ's', those people who had been in the Church, but who had gone out of the Church because they were not of it. They had thought that they were converted, and had been accepted as such. But they had now gone out. They had never really been true believers. They were temporary, false believers. The question arises as to how we can differentiate. How were these ignorant first Christians, most of whom were slaves, to discriminate in these matters? John says: 'But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.' He repeats it in verse 27, 'But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you.'

There is an anointing and an unction given by the Holy Ghost which gives us understanding. And thus it has often come to pass in the long history of the Church that certain ignorant, more or less illiterate people have been able to discriminate between truth and error much better than the great doctors of the Church. They were simple enough to trust to the 'anointing', and thus they were able to distinguish between things that differ. The saintly Samuel Rutherford, that mighty man of God who lived three hundred years ago in Scotland, commented one day: 'If you would be a deep divine, I recommend to you sanctification.' Ultimately the way to understand the Scriptures and all theology is to become holy. It is to be under the authority of the Spirit. It is to be led of the Spirit.

### ***d. The work of the Spirit in defence of the truth***

A fourth way in which the Holy Spirit shows His authority in the individual believer is in the defence of the truth. Now this is something which we are very concerned about these days, and rightly so. We are told in Jude 3 that we should 'contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints' (Rv). But how are we to do this? We tend to do it in terms of apologetics. Again I want to say that I am not denouncing or dismissing apologetics. I believe that apologetics has its rightful place, but I am certain that we are attaching far too much importance to it, and far too many of our books are defending the faith in this way. We are trying to reason, to show our knowledge and to make accommodations. But it does not seem to avail much. We do not seem to be making much of an impression on our opponents.

How, then, is the truth to be defended? In Acts vi you find Stephen in this self-same position. And this is what we read in verses 9 and so: 'Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.' Stephen's secret was that he was full of wisdom and faith and power because he was full of the Holy Ghost. Because of that he could meet these disputers in such a way that they could not resist

the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. That is the way to defend the faith and stand for the truth.

Let us consider some other examples of this same method. The apostle Paul had many adversaries in Corinth, and they were saying bitter things about him. They were trying to ridicule him. They said, 'His presence is weak and his speech contemptible.' (I am afraid that the apostle Paul would not be a popular modern evangelist. It seems that he was not much to look at. We are told that he was a short man, bald-headed with a hooked nose, and that he had a horrible inflammation of his eyes, an ophthalmia, which made him utterly repulsive to look at.) That was the sort of thing they were saying about him. And the apostle writes to them as follows: 'I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power' (I Corinthians iv. 19, 20). The thing that matters, he says, is not understanding or mere speaking; it is the authority, the power of the Holy Ghost.

The apostle says very much the same thing to that same Church in 2 Corinthians x. 3-5, where he puts it thus: 'For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the puffing down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.' That is his method. He is in the flesh, he walks in the flesh, but he does not war 'after the flesh'. He has another authority, another power. It is the power and authority of the Holy Ghost that was in him. He is ready to meet the whole world, and he can bring down all authorities, strongholds and dominions.

Surely it is important for us to realize that here we have the only authority still. We can put up our own little authorities, and the world puts up its authorities. It is simply one authority against another. We spend our time in quoting 'authorities' and discovering this detail and that. We see sometimes in the newspaper that some person or other has now become a believer. And we may think that this will make a great impression on the public. But the essential situation remains unaffected. The only authority that will avail us in all these respects is the authority of the Holy Ghost.

### ***e. The work of the Spirit in evangelism***

That brings me to the most practical matter of all, the authority of the Holy Spirit in evangelism, and in witnessing. Here we consider the task of taking the truth out into the world among those who are not believers. I remember once reading a phrase in an article written by a man about a meeting in which he had listened to two speakers. It was a political, not a religious meeting, but what he said about those two speakers came to me as a conviction from the Holy Spirit. He said that, as he listened to the two men, he felt that this was the main difference between them: the first had spoken brilliantly as an advocate; the second had spoken as a witness. And I asked myself, which am I? Am I an advocate of these things or am I a witness? You can be an advocate of Christianity without being a Christian. You can be an advocate of these

things without experiencing them. If you have intelligence, if you have been rightly trained, you can understand the Scriptures in a sense, and you can lay them out before others. You can present all the arguments, you can put the case for a kind of Christian philosophy. And it may sound wonderful. But you may be standing outside the true experience of it the whole time. You may be talking about something which you do not really know, about Someone you have never met. You are an advocate, perhaps even a brilliant advocate. But note what the Lord said to the apostles: 'Ye shall be my witnesses.'

Let us then work this out together. What the Holy Ghost does with His authority is to make us *witnesses*. I have already shown how our Lord Himself needed this authority before He could preach, do His mighty works and exercise His ministry. The same is true of His disciples. After the resurrection, just before the ascension, our Lord came to these men who had been with Him for three years and said: 'But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth' (Acts i. 8). Do we realize the full significance of that? Here were men who had been with Him for three years. They knew Him intimately, they had listened to His sermons, they had seen His miracles. They had stood there and had watched Him as He died upon the cross. They had seen Him buried in the grave. They knew that He had risen from the dead. He had spoken to them, and He had eaten the broiled fish and honey with them. They had had contact with Him during the forty days and He had taught and instructed them about Himself (see Luke xxiv). If ever men were in a position to testify to the resurrection and to all the facts about the Lord, it was these disciples. And yet what our Lord told them is that they would be quite unable to do it until they had been baptized with the Holy Ghost. Even they could not witness to Him and His works, about who He was and what He had done, until they had received the power. Knowledge of the facts is not enough. Before you can witness effectively there must be this power of the Holy Spirit.

The disciples received that power on the day of Pentecost. The result was, of course, that Peter began to preach immediately with boldness, authority and power, and three thousand were converted. We read in Acts iv that the authorities could not dispute the boldness with which Peter and John bore witness to the resurrection and said these things. It was nothing but a manifestation of the Holy Ghost. The same Peter who had been so nervous and so apprehensive (indeed, who had been such a coward that, because he was afraid of losing his life, he had denied his own Lord, his greatest Friend and Benefactor), now stands up with boldness ready to confront the whole world and all the devils in hell, and proclaims this Jesus whom he had so recently denied, saying: 'I don't know him. I don't belong to him.' What is this? The authority of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit manifesting His authority in an extraordinary manner.

We read later that after these men had been arrested and had become free again, they met together and had a prayer meeting (Acts iv. 23-33). 'When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.' That is His authority. When

He comes upon a meeting, He not only takes hold of men: He can even shake walls and buildings. Again, in Acts iv. 33 we find that 'with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.' What was the secret of their power? That they were able to argue scientifically that resurrection is possible? That they were able to reconcile the miraculous with the scientific? No! It was the authority and power of the Holy Ghost turning these men into living witnesses who were irresistible. 'And great grace was upon them all.'

As you read further in the Acts of the Apostles, you find exactly the same thing happening in the mighty ministry of the apostle Paul. On one occasion when Paul was preaching he was resisted by a man called Elymas, the sorcerer. What happened? 'Then Saul, . . . filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him (Elymas), and said, O full of all subtilty 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' (see Acts xiii. 9 ff.). Such is the authority given by the Holy Spirit to the servant of God.

There are certain specific statements in Scripture which define this quite clearly. Take for instance I Corinthians ii. I am of the opinion that for Evangelicals today this chapter is in many ways the most important single chapter in the whole Bible. Look at this colossus of a man, Paul, who had one of the greatest minds the world has ever known. There is no question about that, judged from any standpoint. And yet Paul tells us that when he went to Corinth he was 'in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling'. He did not bounce on to a platform radiating self-confidence and self-assurance and authority. And he did not let off a few jokes to put himself right with the congregation. He was not perfectly at ease, a 'master of assemblies'. 'Weakness, fear and much trembling.' Why? Because Paul knew his own limitations. He knew what he could not do, and he was terrified, indeed he trembled, lest in any way he or his personality might come between those souls and this tremendous message which had been committed unto him. He did not put on things which he knew would appeal to them. He did the exact opposite. He determined 'not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.' Moreover, he says, 'My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.' Both with regard to his matter and manner he would not pander to the popular taste. And the result was that when he spoke, though some might say that 'his speech was contemptible', there was power, and men and women were convicted and converted, became Christians and were established in the Church. What was the secret? It was 'the demonstration of the Spirit and of power'. It was this Holy Ghost authority. In I Thessalonians i. the apostle puts it thus: 'For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.' I believe that the assurance was in the apostle as well as in the people who believed. It was not the mere word of man. They were not listening to a mere human exposition. He did not set

forth some new and strange philosophy. It was the Word of God that came 'in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance'.

The apostle Peter says exactly the same thing. He talks in I Peter i. 12 about 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.' It is 'with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven' that the gospel is preached with assurance and conviction, with authority and with power.

Surely this is the greatest need at the present time? Go back and read the history of the great revivals in the Church, and you will find that this power of the Holy Ghost and authority is always present. Two hundred years ago a great evangelical awakening was witnessed in England, in America, in Scotland and in Wales. One of the leaders in Wales was a man called Howell Harris. As you read his journals you find that he keeps on saying something like this: 'Arrived at such and such a place; preached. Felt the old authority.' Then another time he says that when he preached in a certain place, 'No authority'. It grieved him and he was unhappy. He fell down before God, searched his heart and confessed his sin and sought 'the authority' again. He was never happy unless he was aware of 'the authority'. It was always the same message, but that was not enough without the authority. He knew that preaching, in a sense, was vain apart from 'the authority'.

One cannot read the journals of Whitefield and of Wesley without finding exactly the same thing. I remember reading in the journals of Whitefield a statement which he makes of what happened while he was preaching in Cheltenham. This is how he expressed it, 'The Lord came down amongst us.' The authority! 'There was a shout of a King amongst us', he said on another occasion. And John Wesley constantly expresses the same thought. That was the essence of his experience in the meeting at Aldersgate in London when he felt his heart 'strangely warmed'. It was from that moment that he had this authority, with the result that his ministry was entirely transformed. Jonathan Edwards experienced exactly the same thing. Dwight L. Moody is also a special instance of this matter. It was after that experience while he was walking down Wall Street in New York City, when the Holy Ghost came upon him, that Moody received his authority. He preached the sermons he had preached before, but they were transformed. Why? He *now* had the authority of the Spirit.

It is unmistakable. I remember reading again in Whitefield's journal of his first visit to Northampton, Massachusetts, the first time he met the saintly Jonathan Edwards. Whitefield remarks that he would never forget how, as he had the privilege of standing and preaching in the pulpit, he noticed that Edwards listened to him with tears streaming down, and a most heavenly smile upon his face. Why was it? It was not merely the preaching of Whitefield, matchless orator though he was. Jonathan Edwards was experiencing the authority of the Holy Spirit. He had known it for himself. He could see it in his brother, his fellow-servant of God, and he was rejoicing in it. It is a wonderful thing when a preacher can enjoy another man's preaching as much as his own. Nothing but the Holy Ghost can do that for him.

Let me end this section with one further story. There was an old preacher in Wales about one hundred and fifty years ago who was invited to preach at a preaching convention held in a little town. The people had already assembled, but the preacher had not come. So the local minister and other leaders sent a maid back to the house where the preacher was staying to tell him that they were waiting for him and that everything was ready. The girl went and when she came back she said: 'I did not like to disturb him. He was talking to somebody.' 'Oh', said they, 'that is rather strange, because everybody is here. Go back and tell him that it is after time and that he *must* come.' So the girl went back again and again she returned and reported, 'He *is* talking to somebody.' 'How do you know that?' they asked. She answered: 'I heard him saying to this other person who is with him, "I will not go and preach to those people if you will not come with me".' 'Oh, it is all right', replied the ministers. 'We had better wait.'

The old preacher knew that there was little purpose in his going to preach unless he knew of a certainty that the Holy Ghost was going with him and giving him authority and power. He was wise enough, and had sufficient spiritual discernment, to refuse to preach until he knew that he had his authority, and that the Holy Ghost was going with him and would speak through him. You and I, however, often preach without Him, and all our cleverness and learning, and all our science and all our apologetics lead to nothing because we lack the authority of the Holy Ghost.

### **THE AUTHORITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH**

Finally, let us consider the authority of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Obviously again we are faced with a large subject. I can only hint at the more important considerations. He gives gifts to the Church. Read I Corinthians xii and you will find He does that in a sovereign manner. He does it according to His own will and understanding. You cannot dictate to Him. You must not therefore say: 'It is time that the Church began to claim the gift of healing, or of miracles or of something else.' We do not claim; He gives. He dispenses according to His own sovereign will. We have referred in the former chapter to the formation of the canon and have seen that that was clearly the leading of the Spirit. I want now to consider especially the authority of the Holy Spirit in the Church as manifested and revealed in revivals of religion.

We must exercise great care in handling such a subject, but it does seem to me to be a great pity that that wonderful man of God, Charles G. Finney, who was himself so mightily used, should have introduced the notion that men can arrange and organize a revival. To me it is a matter of deep regret, because I think it introduces an element of confusion, and leads many to speak of evangelistic campaigns as 'revivals', and to talk about holding a revival. You cannot announce that a revival is going to be 'held'. It is sheer confusion of language, and it is extremely misleading. I believe it is even capable of quenching the Spirit. A revival is something that can never be arranged and organized by men. A revival is the result of the direct action of the Holy Ghost in authority and power. A revival does not just mean preaching the gospel with the result that a number of people are converted. A revival means the Holy Ghost descending

upon a Church or a community or a countryside in power and in might, in an unmistakable manner, breaking men down, and perhaps even casting them physically to the ground. It leads to agonies of repentance and longings for Christ and for peace and salvation. That is what is meant by a revival.

There was a genuine revival, as I have been saying, two hundred years ago. It was a genuine revival that broke out in Northampton, Massachusetts. Jonathan Edwards stood in the pulpit with his manuscript in his hand. As he was reading a sermon, people literally fell to the floor under a terrible conviction of sin and their lost estate. They cried out. In times of revival, people are to be seen walking about the lanes and the streets and the roads in a district in the small hours of the morning crying out for peace with God. They will knock at the door of the minister asking, 'Can you not give me relief?' They are convicted of sin and they see themselves as sinners before a holy and mighty God. They are alarmed by the terrors of hell. Those are always the characteristic features of revival. People are often converted in revivals even before they get to the meeting. As they are walking to a service the Spirit descends upon them. Men working in the fields are suddenly compelled to fall on their knees and to cry out to God for mercy. That is revival. The Spirit of God is shed abroad and comes down in authority and power.

There is nothing that so shows the authority of the Holy Spirit as such happenings. The long history of the Church can be put in the form of a graph. It starts there at Pentecost in what may be described as a mighty revival. After a lapse of time, you remember, the power appeared to have passed, and the Church went down into a trough. The devil and the world were attacking, and everything seemed to be lost. The Church had no authority and no power. Men became desperate. Suddenly God pours out His Spirit again. There is a mighty revival, and the Church is lifted up to the very crest of the wave once more. That is how the history of the Church has progressed. It has not been a steady level. We might wish it to be like that, but it has never been so. It has always been this up and down, and the ups are the revivals, the 'pouring forth' of the Spirit. That is the term used in the second chapter of Acts and everywhere else. Under such mighty outpourings men have testified that they have learned more of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ in an hour in a meeting during a revival than they had learned in a lifetime of Bible study and reading theology. At the same time men and women who had hitherto belonged to the world and who had never heard the gospel before seemed to be put into the same position immediately.

There is something very wonderful about this. A statement in the Psalms says, 'He that dwelleth in the heavens shall laugh', and I believe that God sometimes laughs at the Church. He sees us ready to put out our hands to steady the ark. We think that we alone can do it. We are greatly concerned. We hold our conferences and bring out our proposals. But they come to nothing. Then, when we are quite exhausted, after all our great campaigns, conferences and our brilliant organization, and after we have spent all our money, and things have still gone from bad to worse, God unexpectedly — in the last place where you would ever have expected Him to do so and through the last person you would ever have thought of — suddenly sheds forth the Spirit. Then the

Church rises to a new period of glory, of power and of influence. Men and women are converted in masses, and the power of the truth is again upon them. The Holy Spirit manifests His authority in the Church in revival.

What conclusion do we arrive at as the result of all this? Let us go on with our practical efforts and let us go on with our study, but God forbid that we should rely upon them. Let us equip ourselves as best we can. We shall never be as able and as learned as the apostle Paul, St. Augustine, Luther or Calvin. They were men of great learning and giant intellects. That is the kind of man God seems to use when He does His greatest things in the history of the Church. Let us go on, however, and seek knowledge and equip ourselves as perfectly as possible. But, in the name of God, let us not stop at that. Let us realize that even that, without the authority and the power of the Spirit, is of no value at all. 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love (a product of the work of the Spirit), I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal' (I Corinthians xiii. i). It does not matter who I am or what I may do: it will get me nowhere. It is the authority of the Spirit that alone avails.

Now this is what grieves me. I very rarely hear any Christians today, even Evangelicals, praying for revival. What do they pray for? They pray for their own organized efforts, either at home or in various other lands. In a typical prayer meeting this is what happens. 'First of all let us have the reports', says the chairman. Having heard them, he adds, 'Let us go to prayer about it. You have heard the facts; let us pray about them.' We pray only for blessing on our efforts, whether it be a great evangelistic campaign, or work in the foreign field. That is quite right, of course, and we should do that. But the trouble is that we always start with ourselves and our efforts and ask God to bless them. When did you last hear anyone praying for revival, praying that God might open the windows of heaven and pour out His Spirit? When did you last pray for that yourself? I suggest seriously that we are neglecting this almost entirely. We are guilty of forgetting the authority of the Holy Spirit. We are so interested in ourselves and in our own activities that we have forgotten the one thing that can make us effective. By all means let us continue to pray for the particular efforts, for the minister, and his preaching every Sunday, for all essential organizations and for evangelistic campaigns, if we feel led to have them. But before it all, and after it all, let us pray and plead for revival. When God sends revival He can do more in a single day than in fifty years of all our organization. That is the verdict of sheer history which emerges clearly from the long story of the Church.

This is the greatest need today, indeed it is the only hope. Let us therefore decide that day by day, and many times during the day, we will spend our time before God pleading for revival. But, foolish as we are, we will never do so until we have come to the end of ourselves and of our own resources. We will do so only when everything else has failed, and we have realized our utter bankruptcy and impotence, and we have come to see that our Lord spoke the simple truth when He said 'Without me ye can do nothing' (John xv. 5).

Let us remind ourselves that the God who in the past has come suddenly and unexpectedly upon the dying Church and has raised her to a new period of life and victory can do the same still, that His arm is not shortened, nor His power in any sense diminished. Let us wait upon Him, let us plead with Him, let us learn to agonize in prayer and let our one prayer be:

**Revive Thy work, O Lord,  
Thy mighty arm make bare;  
Speak with the voice that wakes the dead.  
And make Thy people hear.**

'O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy' (Habakkuk iii. 2).

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