

Lecture 8 The Gift of the Spirit.

Acts 2, 8, 10, 19.

"Another Comforter"

Thirteen Lectures on the Operations of the Holy Ghost.

by W. T. P. Wolston, M.D.,

Fourth Edition. 1945

These scriptures present to us a series of four occasions, in the Acts of the Apostles, in which the reception of the Holy Ghost, by men on earth, is distinctly detailed. This book is emphatically the one that details not only the coming, but the abiding personal presence, and varied actings of the Spirit of God upon earth. As I pointed out last Lord's Day evening, you will find the Holy Ghost spoken of in this book over fifty times, and manifesting His presence in various ways. But the most important point, that could possibly be pressed on the soul, is this, that He personally is here. That is the burden of the Acts of the Apostles. From chapter 2 onwards we are constantly reminded of the fact, that there is a divine Person here on the earth, and that He makes His presence felt, and heard, in manifold ways — I do not say seen (John 14: 17) — but nevertheless His personal presence becomes an indisputable fact, brought out in many ways. Not only does He dwell in the body of the believer, as the seal of faith, but as a divine Person He is abidingly present, in the house of God, and makes His presence to be felt, and felt not only by those external manifestations of power, which we get recorded in this book, because these signs and gifts of tongues have passed away. Were they the only proof of His presence, any person might fairly say, — Is He still here? Where are the tongues? Where are all those miraculous interventions — those extraordinary dealings of the Spirit of God — which were so abundant in the past, e.g., healing the sick and raising the dead? They are not found — therefore the Spirit of God is gone. Such a thought is an utter fallacy.

It is important to see that what we find in the Acts of the Apostles, is the perfect counterpart of that which you find in the early part of the Lord's ministry, where He does miracles in abundance, not alone as being the natural outflow of the grace of His heart, to meet man in his need, misery, and sorrow, but to be the attestation of the glory of His person — the attestation that He, the sent One of God, yea, God Himself in human form, was walking through man's earth. Now, it is but meet, that, as the presence of the Son of God among men, was attested then by the miracles to which I have alluded, so should the presence of this unseen Person of the Trinity — this Holy Spirit that was of God — yea, that is God — God the Holy Ghost — should be attested in the same manner. I say it was but meet that there should be, when He first came into this scene, out of which the Son of God had been cast, a testimony to His presence, that should convince the most gainsaying, that a new presence, a new power, a new Person was here amongst men. You have, therefore, the gift of tongues, and the miracles recorded in the Acts of

the Apostles. The former are alluded to by the apostle Paul, and their object signified, as he says, "Tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not" (1 Cor. 14: 22).

But the gift of the Holy Ghost, I repeat, is infinitely higher than any effect that that gift may produce in the way of power; and although the signs and manifestations, and tongues, and miraculous interventions have disappeared, in the wisdom of God — their necessity no longer existing — we may rejoicingly be certain of this, that the Holy Ghost, not merely as an influence for good, but as a Divine Person, is still upon the earth today, and as active as ever in leading the soul into the enjoyment of heavenly things. The very last page of the New Testament, yea, almost the last verse, records, spite of the sin and failure of the Church, His faithful abiding presence, as we read, "the Spirit and the bride say, Come," to the yearning Bridegroom — the Lord Jesus. God is faithful, however unfaithful man may have been. The Holy Ghost is faithful, however unfaithful the Church has been, and therefore what obtained in the Acts of the Apostles, obtains now. I say boldly, that for any man today to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, is an insult to the grace of God, as shown to us in the gift of the blessed Comforter, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. I know such a statement may seem a little strong, and may possibly awaken questions in some minds, but I adhere to it. To look then for a continually renewed outpouring of the Spirit of God is, to put it in plain language, a positive denial of the wonderful truth which the Acts of the Apostles records.

There are two ways in which I desire tonight, with the Lord's help, to look at this book. Firstly, to review the four great occasions on which the Spirit of God came to, and indwelt, those who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; and, secondly, the ways He took to affirm His Presence, apart from external manifestations, or sign-gifts. Of the four occasions referred to, the second of Acts is the chapter to which I first turn. There you have the fullest and the most comprehensive expression of the coming of the Holy Ghost. Not only does He fall, first of all, upon the hundred and twenty, and they are filled, and the Church, the house of God, and the body of Christ is formed, but, as the result of Peter's preaching, three thousand souls, without doubt, received the Spirit of God.

Now you will find that on these four interesting occasions, where the Spirit of God comes — upon the Jews in the second of Acts — upon the Samaritans in the eighth — upon the Gentiles in the tenth — and upon the Ephesian proselytes in the nineteenth — while they are all alike in the glorious fact of the Holy Ghost personally coming to them, each scene differs as to its antecedents, and in the way in which the Holy Ghost was received. This difference, we may be sure, is of God, and not to be lightly esteemed, or overlooked by any one who fears God, and seeks to know His ways.

When we look at the second of Acts, what do we find? Peter's beautiful testimony to the exaltation of the Lord Jesus, "Therefore 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." Tongues of fire, on the heads of the disciples, and miraculous testimony to Christ, in every known language, by unlettered men, who had never learned the same, were what they saw and heard. Peter's testimony to the One whom they had refused, and slain, but whom God had exalted, had the most powerful effect — namely this, "They were pricked in their heart"; i.e. they were convicted. You have there the very first effect of the action of the Holy Ghost upon the

souls of men. They were convicted of their sins. Their consciences were reached. These men were confronted with their guilt. They were, so to speak, arraigned by the Lord, and brought into the presence of God, and their sin not only charged on them, but they were made conscious of what that sin was. There was a distinct breach between them and God. God had delighted in Jesus. They had slain Him. God had raised Him, and put Him into glory, and the Holy Ghost had come down to declare this wonderful fact. Thoroughly convicted, they now say, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Note the apostle's answer: "Then Peter said unto 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."

What Peter says in effect is this — If you repent, and are baptized in the name of the One, whom you refused and murdered, seven short weeks ago, you will receive like blessing with us — you will receive the Holy Ghost. Why is the truth put in this way? I think there cannot be the shadow of a doubt as to the wisdom of the Lord in guiding His servant to put it this way. He does not tell them to believe in Jesus. That may be needful when you come to Acts 10. He does not tell them to trust in Jesus. No, He peals out the clarion note of John the Baptist — unheeded in his day — Repent. There must be repentance. No man ever yet had to do with God unless there was repentance. I do not deny that faith is a requisite to blessing also, but faith is the reception of a Divine testimony. These men had faith. They believed that Jesus was exalted. What was the result? "They were pricked in their hearts." What next? "Repent," says Peter. You may ask, What is repentance? I believe it is the judgment which the soul passes on itself, as, in the light of God's presence, it learns what the truth is — the truth about God, the truth about Jesus, and the truth about my sins, and my sinful state. Repentance is taking God's side against myself, Repentance is the teardrop in the eye of faith. I would to God I saw that tear-drop in every eye before me tonight. It was in the eyes of those Peter addressed. Repentance holds a large place in the preaching of the apostles. It would be well if, now-a-days, it were more pressed. There must be the judgment of what I have done, and what I am. It is a blessed moment in his history when a man repents — when he judges himself. It is my accepting the testimony of God as to the state of my heart, and owning my utter ruin, in truthfulness and uprightness.

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins," is the counsel of God to those awakened hosts, now deeply convicted of their guilt in the murder of Jesus. Peter, so to speak, says, If you are really repentant, you will own your guilt, and, in as public a manner declare your repentance, by being baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ, as you publicly, and all together joined in the cry, "Away with him — away with him — crucify him, crucify him." The truth of their repentance would be manifested by their action. I do not doubt there may be spurious faith, and that there may be spurious repentance, but such was not the case here. All were deeply convicted of their sins and they wanted to know what was to be done. The Gospel put before them was, "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." And why? "For the promise is unto you, and to your children." Thank God for that! It is not only on myself, but on my family, that God has His eye. "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort." Peter was undoubtedly led to expound, and enforce what he had said, so that they might then get God's blessing; and I would press upon you to get blessing this night. Peter concluded with, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." It

may seem a remarkable thing to say, "Save yourselves." But I advise you, my friend, to save yourself. Come clear out of the world, now under judgment, and cleave to the Saviour, who has gone through the judgment, and is now at God's right hand in glory. That is the way to save yourself. Go to the Saviour.

"Then they that gladly" (the word "gladly" is perhaps doubtful; I do not think there was any great gladness at the moment: the sense of their sin made them sad, not glad) "received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." What a beautiful triumph of grace! That, then, was the way the Jew - the haughty, proud, rebellious Jew — got blessing from God on the day of Pentecost.

Let us pass now to the second occasion, which we find recorded in the eighth of Acts. In the seventh chapter of that book you will find that Stephen, "full of the Holy Ghost," gives a most beautiful testimony to the Son of Man, whom he sees, standing at God's right hand. His charge against the nation is most solemn — "Ye do always *resist* the Holy Ghost" (ver. 51). The guilty nation, to whom Peter had preached twice, or thrice, since the second of Acts, consummate their iniquity by refusing Stephen's message. They really are the "citizens" to whom the Lord referred when He said, "A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19: 12-14). Stephen was the man they sent after the nobleman. He was their messenger, and the message he carried up was, "We will not have this man to reign over us." The Jewish nation refused their Messiah on earth, and a Saviour in glory. They filled up the cup of their sins. Stephen died like his Master, with all the beautiful grace of Christ expressed in him. "Full of the Holy Ghost," his last breath was expended in saying, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

Stephen could not end his prayer as his Master did in the moment of His death. The Lord on the cross had said "Father, forgive them, for *they know not what they do*." Stephen, full of, and held in check by the Holy Ghost, could not say these words, because he knew, for the Spirit knew, that they were all resisting light, as they did know who Jesus really was. Stephen, then, the first martyr for the truth, died with the image of His blessed Master stamped on him. The result was a tremendous persecution. We see in the next chapter that the whole assembly at Jerusalem was scattered abroad. "At that time there was great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8: 1). It is a remarkable thing that the very men, whom the Lord had told to go unto all nations (see Matt. 28: 19, 20), contaminated by Jewish ideas, and metropolitan associations, remained at Jerusalem, and would not go forth. Well, says God, I must get others to do the work, if you will not, and lesser brethren are driven east, west, north, and south, to carry the gospel of God's grace far and near. There is a great lesson in this for us all.

In Acts 8: 5 we read, "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." Philip before this had been appointed to diaconal work in Jerusalem (see Acts 6: 1-6). He was a deacon, and as such he had the distribution of the funds of the assembly, and the happy work of looking after the poor; but as soon as the assembly was broken up, his duties ceased, and now, in the exercise of the spiritual gift, which the Lord (not the apostles) gave him,

he started out to preach, having already graduated, not at a college or university, but in the bosom of God's assembly, for "They that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." This the apostle Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 3: 13. With a "good degree" to his name Philip goes forth, but he was also the possessor of a most rare gift. This is proved in chapter 8, and recorded by the Holy Ghost in chapter 21, where he is called, that which I am not aware that any other man is called in the New Testament, "Philip *the evangelist*, which was one of the seven" (Acts 21: 8). He did not get that spiritual qualification by apostolic appointment, or intervention, or laying on of hands. He got the diaconal office in that way. His gift as an evangelist he received from the ascended Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus, and he went out in its exercise, and preached in Samaria — a city ripe for blessing.

There were beautiful results. "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (John 4: 35), the Lord had said, as He sat outside this city; and they had been going on ripening ever since. Now Philip comes down and puts in the sickle; and oh! what a harvest! "*Many* believed," you will remember, because of the word that the woman spoke of Jesus, and when others came out to Christ, "*many more* believed because of his own word." Now, through Philip's preaching, *most* of them believed in the blessed Son of God. It was an illustration of the Lord's own Word, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father" (John 14: 12). Philip "preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles." The whole city was moved by the testimony of the Spirit through the evangelist. "For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them; and many taken with palsies and that were lame were healed. *And there was great joy in that city.*" This earnest man — not an apostle, but a simple evangelist — is empowered by the Holy Ghost to do what we read of here. But the Spirit of God had not taken up His abode in that city as yet. So far He was only in the person of that one servant; although there was "great joy in that city" through the reception of Christ, as yet the Holy Ghost was fallen upon *none* of them (ver. 16).

"Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John." I think that is a beautiful word, that "Samaria had received the word of God." The Jews had been trying hard to make them receive the law, but it had been a dead failure. That was the reason why "the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans." What the law failed to do, the sovereign grace of God effected. The whole city received the word. "And there was great joy in that city." It was one of the triumphs of grace. Hearing of this, the apostles sent down from Jerusalem, Peter and John — two pillars in the Church - "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. Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost" (vers. 14-17).

Now, at once you must see the marked and clear difference between this scene, and what took place in Jerusalem. There it was, "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." They repented, were baptized, and received the Holy Ghost. Here, on the other hand, although they had believed, and been baptized, they had not one of them received the Holy Ghost. They had

heard the Gospel, and had believed it. Philip had borne a beautiful testimony. There is only one thing stated. He went down and "preached Christ." That is the way to get at souls. If any of you here are preachers, and wish to know the way to win souls, let Philip teach you, for he "preached Christ to them," nothing more, and nothing less, and his results were splendid. But although these Samaritans had believed the Gospel, were full of joy, and, furthermore, had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, yet, strange to say, they had not received the Holy Ghost. Why was this? I think the reason is not far to seek, and it fills the heart with thankfulness when one sees the wisdom of God in that which took place.

When our blessed Lord met the poor woman at Sychar's well outside Samaria, and began to speak to her, she suddenly said, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." The Lord replied, "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father." Worship therefore was to be of an entirely new order and character. It was to be worship of the Father, in spirit, and in truth, the result of knowing a heavenly Saviour, and being on heavenly ground, in the power of the Spirit. Samaria had always been in the position of the religious rival of Jerusalem. "This mountain" had a very strong hold upon the hearts of the Samaritans. Now, supposing that consequent upon Philip's preaching, and their believing the Gospel, getting their sins forgiven, and being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, that the Holy Ghost had fallen upon them, what would have been the inevitable result? The old religious rivalry would have been perpetuated. Such is human nature, even in saints, that the church in Samaria would have lifted its head and said, "We are the Samaritan church. We have been saved, and we have received the Spirit of God as well as those at Jerusalem," and thus the blessed truth of the oneness of the Church of God — which the presence of the Holy Ghost forms - would have been practically denied, God's object frustrated, and there would have been engendered that which, alas, has sprung up since, and borne such sad fruit — the thought of a national Church.

Such a thought as this, I need scarcely say, is absolutely, foreign to Scripture. A national Church! Where do you as a Christian belong to? Why, you belong to heaven, and not to earth. The thought of independency is nipped in the very bud, in the perfect wisdom of God. He will not let the Spirit of God, which is the bond of union in the Church — He will not permit that which is the absolute formative power of the Church, to fall on the Samaritan believers until the two apostles come down from Jerusalem, and link the work of God there with that which Philip was instrumental in at Samaria. First of all, praying for the disciples, and then laying their hands on them, the Holy Ghost is received. This action is very simple. God would have the Samaritan believers to understand, that what was now going on among them, and the work at Jerusalem, was one and the same thing. One energy produced it — one Head in glory, and one Spirit on earth. God would have them apprehend that He would allow nothing that might seem to falsify the unity of the Church, and therefore, in divine wisdom, the Spirit of God did not come until the apostles, by the laying on of their hands, linked on, and connected the work in Samaria, with that already existing at Jerusalem.

This lesson is as important for us as for them. The Church of God is one. We live in a day when the differences among professing Christians are so multiplied, that we are told that there are no less than thirteen hundred different sects in Christendom. That is a shame to Christendom, and a shame to Christians too. What I find in Scripture is this, that "by one spirit are we all

baptized into *one body*" (1 Cor. 12: 13). That was the truth which God would emphasise on this occasion, for the laying on of hands, in Scripture, almost always carries with it the thought of identification. When the worshipper, in Leviticus 1, offered his burnt offering, he put his hand upon the bullock's head so as to identify himself with the excellence of the burnt sacrifice offered to God. When Aaron, in the sixteenth of Leviticus, sent forth the scape-goat, he put both his hands on its head, to identify the sins of the people with it. It was this identification with His assembly, already pre-existing, that God wished should be manifested, and in the manner in which the Holy Ghost was received by the Samaritan believers, the truth is most strikingly taught. The apostles came down and showed that the Church was one, and that God would not have the bare thought of independency, for one moment to be suggested, by the Holy Ghost coming in any other way.

I know that some Christians argue for, and defend independency. All such should carefully ponder this scene, for they will not find such a thought, or such a principle commended, but the reverse, in the Word of God. The great truth of Christianity is dependence, as regards Christ, and mutual dependence — not independence — as regards the Church, and therefore the Lord here in the early days of the Church taught this truth. The Church is one, and God would have "no schism in the body."

Passing now to the third crisis, in Acts 10, we find that which interests us greatly, as here first we have the Gentiles brought into the Church, and the body of Christ expressed on earth. Between the eighth and tenth chapters, Paul, the apostle of the truth of the mystery of the Church, had been called. That remarkable servant of God, who was the apostle of the Gentiles, and the "chosen vessel" for the revelation of the truth of the mystery — the body of Christ, and whose writings develop that truth, had been called, and brought into the assembly, and was beginning to work. Peter, in the exercise of that which the Lord gave him in Matthew 16 — the keys of the kingdom of heaven (mark, it is not the keys of heaven - it is the keys of the kingdom of heaven) — had in Acts 2 opened the Jewish leaf of the door, to admit them to the kingdom, and now, in the tenth of Acts, he is led of the Lord to open the other leaf for the Gentiles. I admit he is not brisk at the work. At first he is slow, and it takes some time before he can be brought to do that which God would have him do. Nevertheless he does it; and the circumstances are remarkably interesting.

There dwelt a Roman centurion, at Caesarea — pious, godly man. As the early part of the chapter (Acts 10) tells us, he was "a devout man, and one that feared God, with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway." He was a converted man — quickened by the Spirit of God, but he had not received the Holy Ghost, and as yet he had not peace with God. He was a type of thousands of souls today — awakened, quickened souls, with godly desires; devout, generous, benevolent, prayerful people, and yet they are without peace. They do not know what pardon is. While this man is *in prayer*, God sends an angel to him, telling him to send for Peter. While Peter is on the house-top, also *in prayer*, the Lord gives him a vision of heaven opened, and a vessel like a great sheet, knit at the four corners, let down to earth; "wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air." Then comes a voice, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." This Peter refuses, but the voice says, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." This is repeated three times, and at length, while he "doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should

mean," the Spirit says to him, as we read in verse 19, "Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing, for I have sent them." These men give him their message, and Peter goes with them the next day. Cornelius is waiting for him with his kinsmen and near friends. When he heard from God that His messenger is to come, he immediately desires that others should participate in the blessing. I do not think it is possible for a person to be born of God, and blessed of Him, without a desire springing up that those around him should share in this grace.

Cornelius tells Peter why he sent for him, and closes what he has to say with, "Now, therefore, are we all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." That was a very earnest audience gathered in the presence of God, and little wonder that there was deep blessing that day in Cornelius' house. Peter now knows the truth: he has learned the lesson of the great sheet, as he says, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted (or, as it should be, "acceptable," or, "well pleasing to him" — acceptance is on totally different grounds, as we learn from Eph. 1: 6) with him." A new lesson entirely was this to Peter.

It is manifest that God's call had not gone out to a pagan idolater, and Peter only speaks of those who feared God, and wrought righteousness. This is exactly what Cornelius did, and the Lord had signified his acceptability to Himself by sending His angel. His was no mere hollow profession, but a real state of soul. God-fearing, pious, and prayerful, he was born again, converted, but not yet what Scripture calls "saved" (Acts 11: 14), a term implying the fullest blessing, in the knowledge of association with a victorious risen Saviour. But in going out to the Gentiles, how wise the way of God to begin with this man, whom not even the most opposing Jew could deny was godly! Thus you see a man might be godly, and yet not know the privileges of Christianity. These he is now to be brought into. "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all), that word ye know," says Peter. Cornelius was not ignorant of it. He had evidently heard what had gone on with regard to Jesus. He had heard, moreover, that God was preaching peace through Jesus Christ, but it was "to the children of Israel." Now, why did Cornelius not get peace? For a beautiful reason. He was just and upright, and he knew he was not in the favoured circle of Israel. Consequently he judged it was not for him. He desired to get peace, but it was for Israel, and he was not in that favoured company. While deeply desirous of blessing, he felt himself unworthy of it, and that he had no claim to it. Here it is then, that the grace of God comes in so sweetly.

Peter goes on, and tells how Jesus "went about doing good," how the Jews slew Him, how God raised Him, and how He was seen, after His resurrection, by many witnesses. He concludes his testimony by saying, "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. While Peter yet spake these words, *the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.*" What had they heard? Ah! this is wonderful news for you and me, for we are Gentiles. "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Do you wish the remission of your sins? You are welcome to it. "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, *whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.*" Ah! but you may say, what about repentance? God says nothing about it here. I doubt not they had repented. There was no need to press it on those who were so deeply anxious. What they needed was the simple, beautiful

Gospel of Jesus. "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." If you are here in your sins, and desirous to have them remitted, *i.e.* forgiven, let me tell you this good news of the Saviour of sinners, "through his name, whosoever believeth in him SHALL RECEIVE REMISSION OF SINS."

Forgiveness of sins is now preached to every creature, Jew or Gentile, bond or free, through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. By the work which He has accomplished, sins are put away from before God, and whosoever believeth in Him receives forgiveness thereof. But who does he mean by "whosoever"? Does he not mean you? Yes, surely it means you as well as me. If you can truly say, I believe in Him, you receive remission of sins. But I do not *feel* it, you may argue. It does not say, "Whosoever believeth in him shall *feel* the remission of sins." No, it says, "Whosoever believeth in him *shall receive* remission of sins." I forgive, says God, the soul that cleaves to My Son. It is due to Christ that God should pardon and bless the soul that believes in Him.

Undoubtedly the Spirit of God, in the case of Cornelius and his friends, had wrought in their hearts, and had given them the sense of need before God. To have the sense of need produced in the soul, to be quickened by the Spirit of God, and brought low in repentance is one thing, but to get the knowledge of forgiveness, and to receive the Holy Ghost, as the seal of faith, is another. What do we find here, however? "While Peter spake these words, the Holy Ghost *fell on all them which heard the word.*" Nothing could exceed this rich and singular display of God's grace. There is no limitation, nor any question of baptism introduced; and not a word about apostles coming down to pray for, and lay their hands upon them. The greater the distance from God, as was the case with the Gentiles, the freer does the grace come out to those who have no claim on God. The scene sparkles with the brilliancy of the grace of God. The rebellious Jew must repent, and be publicly baptized; the pseudo-religious Samaritan hears the Gospel, believes it, and is baptized in the name of Jesus, but he must wait till the apostles come down, pray for, and lay their hands upon him, ere the Holy Ghost come. The Gentile, who was afar off, and had nationally no link with God, — and that is where you and I come in, — hears the truth, believes the Gospel, and gets the Holy Ghost on the spot, without any of these preliminaries. This is a blessed truth which we do well to hold tenaciously, for we live in a day when there are not wanting those who affirm, that there is no possibility of receiving the Holy Ghost, except through the intervention of man, and man's hand. Scripture, by the record of God's ways in the house of Cornelius, silences all such folly, for I can call it nothing else.

Nothing can be more beautiful than this outflow of the grace of God among this company of Gentiles. They believe the testimony sent them to the value of Jesus' name in the remission of sins, and, as a result, the Holy Ghost fell upon all them that heard the word. And they of the circumcision, which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out THE GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST." That they had received this incomparable Gift, is proved by what follows: "For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God." The evidence that they had received the Holy Ghost was patent to the ear, and eye, of Peter, and of his Jewish brethren. He had been careful for his character, and hence took down with him six brethren, that they might take note of what should happen, and join him in testimony concerning it, as they do, before the opposers at Jerusalem, in Acts 11 God had said,

"In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established," and so it was in this case.

Let us mark it well, that it is thus that *we*, believing Gentiles, receive the Holy Ghost. God is all in this scene, and man nowhere — he disappears in the excess of the grace of God. Had apostolic intervention been necessary to the Gentiles receiving the Holy Ghost, an apostle was there, either to baptize, or to lay on hands, but such was not God's order. If any prefer to go back to Jewish, or Samaritan ground, they must do so, but faith always gladly hails any new departure in the ways of God. The truth is, that when apostles were here men despised them; now that they exist not, unbelief equally thinks they are indispensable, as the channel for the impartation of the Spirit. What grace of God, to make all so clear and certain to the contrary, in His written Word!

And now I would ask you, Have you received the Spirit of God? I daresay some may say, That is a very serious question to ask. I admit it, but if you turn to the fourth, and last occasion, where the Holy Ghost is related to have fallen on believers — as given us in Acts 19 — you will find the question I have put to you, is that which led to their receiving the Holy Ghost. "And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, 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?" A very striking, and a very important question, and, moreover, it shows that a man may be a believer, may be a child of God, may be converted, and yet may not have the Holy Ghost. They were disciples, and the apostle credits their belief, but nevertheless says, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" Perhaps you may inquire — What made him put that question? I think it is very likely they were not quite at ease. From their faces possibly the apostle could see that there was a want of joy.

When a man has received the Holy Ghost he is full of joy. When he has not received the Holy Ghost he is perplexed and exercised about his state before God; he has no settled knowledge of peace, or relationship, or of what it is to be in Christ; for all possession of Christian blessing is the effect of the Spirit's indwelling. Hence he never looks bright and cheerful, and it may have been the look on their countenances that caused Paul to ask the question, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether the Holy Ghost be (come)." They did not, as some ignorantly affirm, doubt His existence, but they knew not of His presence. That believers should receive Him was a promise known in Scripture, and proclaimed by John the Baptist, as we have seen. But these men had not heard of the day of Pentecost. They had not heard of the finished work of Christ, nor of the Holy Ghost having come down. Therefore Paul next asks — "Unto what then were ye baptized? and they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." John had only preached "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke 3: 3). Forgiveness was not preached — it was to be waited for, but now, since John's testimony, Christ had died and risen again, and been glorified, and the Holy Ghost had come down. John had insisted on self-judgment, and an acknowledgement of their total ruin, without proclaiming the news of forgiveness. Paul preached a Saviour come, redemption accomplished, and the Holy Ghost come down, to be the power in the soul, that leads it into the enjoyment of Christ's victory. "When they heard this they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." They bowed to Christ, and owned Him Lord. They acknowledged the claims,

and authority, and lordship of Him who was raised from the dead. "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues and prophesied." Here again the external signs are apparent, but there is no confusion of THE GIFT — and the gifts.

Why, here, does Paul lay his hands on them? As you know, Paul at this moment was dogged by Jewish teachers, who would have the law, and circumcision, pressed on the Gentiles. They were seeking to undervalue his apostleship, and make out that his ministry was of a lower nature, and character, than that of the other apostles, because he had not accompanied the Lord, when on earth. They failed to understand his ministry, his preaching, and his apostleship, or were ignorant of the truth, that he had received his call from heaven. God would substantiate His servant, and took this way of upholding his apostleship. It took Peter and John together to communicate the Holy Ghost to the Samaritans. Paul *alone* sufficed at Ephesus. It so pleased God, and in the same way as the two apostles linked on the work in Samaria, with that which pre-existed, so here does Paul, by his action similarly link the work in Ephesus to that which had gone before. A passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians evidently alludes to this incident. "In whom ye also (trusted), after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also *after that ye believed*, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1: 13). You have there the divine order; the sinner hearing the word of truth, the gospel of his salvation, believes in Him who has accomplished the work. What then? He is sealed "with that holy Spirit of promise." It is *the sinner* who *believes*; it is the *believer* who is *sealed* by the Spirit.

The great point for us to get hold of is this, that the way in which the Holy Ghost fell upon the Jews in Acts 2, the Samaritans in Acts 8, and the Jewish proselytes in Acts 19, is of a different character in each case, God having a special reason for the diverse actings mentioned. When the Gentiles were blessed it was God alone who acted, and it is under this class that we fall.

I will now briefly call your attention to the second point I named at the outset, viz., the frequent way in which in the Acts we read of the Spirit, not as an influence, but as a Divine Person, actually present on earth, and acting according to His own will. Not only is the Holy Ghost *in us* as believers, but *with us*. This the Acts strikingly reveals in many instances. When the apostles prayed in the fourth of Acts, "the place was shaken where they were assembled together." The Holy Ghost was there, and He made His presence to be felt. This had nothing to do with the truth, blessed as it is, that He was *in* any particular believer, for "they were all *filled* with the Holy Ghost" then. The point is, an unseen Person was *there*. Again when Ananias and Sapphira lied before the apostles in Acts 5, Peter said, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? . . . thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." To his wife he said, "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt *the Spirit* of the Lord?" God was present in the Church, God the Holy Ghost. Amazing, but most blessed truth, God was now dwelling righteously, but in the most inconceivable grace, on earth, and amongst those who had been sinners by nature, but were now washed in the blood of His Son, and fit to be His temple. Peter recognised this wondrous fact that the assembly was now the habitation of God, and hence any sin was sin against the Holy Ghost dwelling there.

Again, in Acts 8, we find the Spirit busy with the Lord's work, as we read, "The Spirit said to Philip, Go near and join thyself to this chariot" (ver. 29). An angel (ver. 26) had told him what road to go. In this sense the providence of God was manifest to Philip, and even yet to us, for Heb. 1: 14 is still surely true. But it was not an angel, but the Spirit whose voice bade him draw near the anxious Ethiopian eunuch. Guidance of a similar nature although we may not hear Him as Philip did, is surely vouchsafed to us in dealing with souls. The Spirit knows their need, and lovingly works through Christ's members, and servants, all unconscious oftentimes of what He is going to do. The love of the Spirit is a real thing, as well as the love of Christ.

We have already seen in Peter's case that "*the Spirit* said unto him, Behold three men seek thee, arise," etc. (Acts 10: 19). He had His eye on the awakened Gentile, and commanded His chosen vessel to go, and do His bidding. This Peter is careful to relate, as being quite conscious whose voice it was that directed him. "*The Spirit* bade me go" (Acts 11: 12).

Passing now to chapter 13, we find the Holy Ghost the direct author of a missionary enterprise. We read, "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the *Holy Ghost* said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (ver. 2). This word was manifestly to the company of prophets, and teachers, in the assembly at Antioch. It was not merely an influence *in* Barnabas, and Saul, but a direct injunction to others *about* them, which was obeyed.

Again, in chapter 16, Paul and his companions were "forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia." Assaying to go into Bithynia, "the Spirit suffered them not" (Acts 16: 6, 7). Determined to go to Jerusalem, we read of Paul, that "the Holy Ghost witnessed in every city that bands and afflictions" awaited him (Acts 20: 23). Nor is this all, for in godless Tyre, the disciples said to Paul, *through* the Spirit, "that he should not go up to Jerusalem" (Acts 21: 4). This command, unheeded by the apostle, is followed, in verse 11, by a detailed statement of the issue of a journey, in which I find he was not led of the Spirit, although God might, and did overrule it for the blessing of His servant, and of the whole Church. It was in Caesarea, and in Philip's house, that Agabus "took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, "Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." Now, it is a weighty fact that from that moment, you never read of the Holy Ghost again in Acts, save Paul's allusion to him when a prisoner at Rome (Acts 28: 25). History goes on, but the Holy Ghost is not named. Why, I will not venture to say.

But is that same divine Person yet abiding on earth, or is all changed, and has He, because so sadly unheeded, disappeared from the bosom of God's Church on earth? Ah! let us not cast discredit upon the Spirit of truth, and upon the Word of God, by such unworthy thoughts. The Lord had said to His disciples, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may ABIDE WITH YOU FOR EVER; even the Spirit of truth. . . . He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." We have seen how Jesus went away, and we have heard also how the Spirit came to dwell with the early disciples, and He dwells with us now. I believe He dwells in the Church today, and what you and I want, is faith in the abiding presence of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, at this present moment. God give us, dear friends, to have faith in His presence, because the more we count upon Him, the more blessing there will be for us.

