

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

F. B. Hole.

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We have considered many of the direful consequences of sin; there remains one further effect to be emphasized. It has reduced men to a state of powerlessness. Not only are we fallen into bondage to sin, as we saw when considering **redemption**, but we are totally without power to please God or to serve Him. Now one thing is certain: the creature should within its own limits perfectly serve the Creator.

Power we must have; both to deliver us from the paralysis **internal** to ourselves, which sin has produced, and to enable us to go rightly through **external** circumstances, as those who serve the will of God. Power is conferred upon us, and the wonderful thing is that it should be by the indwelling of the Spirit of God. Something much less than this might have sufficed for us, but nothing short of it has been given of God. The risen Christ, about to go on high, said to His disciples, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me" (Acts 1: 8). This promise was fulfilled ten days later on the day of Pentecost, as Acts 2 records.

In Ezekiel 36 and 37, as we have seen, there are prophecies as to the work of new birth and quickening, which will be wrought in the remnant of Israel in a coming day, preparing them for millennial blessedness. In both chapters there is mention also of the gift of the Holy Spirit — "I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them" (Ezek. 36: 27): "And shall put My Spirit in you, and ye shall live" (Ezek. 37: 14). As a consequence of this there will be spiritual life in Israel, which will express itself in active obedience to God's will. As God directs, so they will do. Other Old Testament scriptures have similar predictions, notably the end of Joel 2, which Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost, saying that what had just occurred in their midst was a sample of what Joel had foretold. We shall see however that the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost has in it a fulness and permanence hardly contemplated in Old Testament times.

New birth is produced by the Holy Spirit, and in result we have, as John 3: 6, indicates, a new nature which is "spirit" in its essential character. That which is produced by the Spirit's action partakes

of His own nature. This must of course be distinguished from the Spirit indwelling men already born again, which is what occurred at Pentecost; and it is very necessary to observe that power is connected, not with the new nature produced by the Spirit, but with the Holy Spirit as a Person, actually indwelling the believer's body. This is quite manifest in the passage, Romans 7: 7 - 8: 4.

In Romans 7 we are given the experience of one who is born again, for he possesses "the inward man," which delights in the law of God (verse 22). Consequently he approves what is good and earnestly desires it, yet finds himself unable to practise it. It is not until we reach the Deliverer in "Jesus Christ our Lord" (verse 25), and go on to read of "the law [or, control] of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," that we find power to overcome "the law [or, control] of sin and death" (Rom. 8: 2), and to fulfil those things which the law so righteously required (Rom. 8: 4). The **power** that delivers is found in Christ, and in His Spirit, who has been given to us.

This passage in Romans shows us the power that delivers us from the internal paralysis that sin induces, and this of course is a prerequisite, if we are to be marked by power in witness to our risen Lord, which is what is contemplated in Acts 1: 8, and also in Luke 24: 49. It should be a very sobering thought for all of us, that even as saints no power is **vested** in us. All power for us is vested in **the Spirit of God**, who has been given to us.

The eleven men to whom the Lord spoke were Apostles, on whom as a foundation the church has been built. There had been a powerful work of the Spirit in them, and for three years or more they had been under special instruction, such as no men before had ever had. Yet none of these things conferred the necessary power upon them. However eager they may have been to start their great work of witness, they were at a standstill until the Spirit was given. Not one word of witness did they utter until then. But then, their mouths were immediately opened, and with what astonishing results!

We must not overlook the fact that on the day of Pentecost the disciples not merely received the Spirit to indwell them, but "they were all **filled** with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2: 4); and when a believer is filled with Him there is no force **active** within, as a check on His power. This filling of the Spirit is not permanent like His indwelling, for Peter was **again** filled with the Spirit in Acts 4: 8, and **yet again**, as we find in verse 31 of the same chapter. When the Spirit does thus fill a believer, the flesh in him is judged and quiescent, and His power is irresistible. Stephen illustrates this; for being full of the Holy Ghost, he was "full of faith and power," and his opponents "were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake" (Acts 6: 8, 10). Unable to resist, they flew to violence, and their stones battered his body to death, thus destroying that "temple" of the Holy Spirit.

Though the history, recorded in Acts, shows that in practice the filling of the Spirit was occasional, even with the Apostles, we must not forget that all Christians are exhorted to be filled with the Spirit, in Ephesians 5: 18. It may surprise us to find such a thing put in contrast with being "drunk with wine," but the fact is that when wine is taken in excess it assumes control of the man and carries him outside himself. All that is from beneath and is evil. The Spirit of God however can control, and carry a man outside himself, in a way that is good and divine. The very good is contrasted with the very evil. If filled with the Spirit, all that is not Himself and of Him obviously must be excluded.

Now it is in these other things, that fill so much of our thoughts and time and energies, that the hindrances to the realization of power are to be found; and in this connection we have to contemplate not only things positively evil but many things that are trivial and profitless. Hence we get the word, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God" (Eph. 4: 20). If we grieve Him, we do not lose His indwelling presence, for the verse continues, "whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." We do however lose much of the benefit of His presence. Both spiritual joy and spiritual power are lost until the

grieving thing is put away. Some of the things which grieve are mentioned in the verses which precede and which follow. How much the Spirit of God has been grieved by malice, evil-speaking and bitterness amongst saints. The wonder is that His power is manifested at all!

The Apostle Paul was called and saved that he might be a pattern to us. This 1 Timothy 1: 16 informs us. So in his life of service and witness we can see how the power of the Spirit wrought.

Romans 15: 15 shows the extraordinary **range** of his service. From Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum — the modern Albania — he fully preached the Gospel. Within about 25 years he had fully evangelized peoples living in territories covering hundreds of thousands of square miles, travelling on foot with the occasional help of a boat on the sea and an animal on the land. A miraculous feat indeed! One only possible for him as energized by the Spirit of God.

1 Corinthians 2: 1-5 shows the **simplicity** of his preaching. All merely human adornments were discarded, that the central fact of the Cross of Christ might be the more plainly revealed. What marked his preachings was "demonstration of the Spirit and of power:" so that as regards those who received his message, their faith should stand not in "the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

2 Corinthians 3: 1-6, and 2 Corinthians 4: 1-7, show us the **life-giving power** of Paul's new covenant ministry. His converts were "the epistle of Christ," written "with the Spirit of the **living** God," and, says he, "the Spirit giveth **life**." Both life and light are connected in this passage, for he says, "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" shines through "earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

2 Corinthians 10: 1-6 shows us the power of spiritual weapons in the aggressive conflicts of the Gospel. Satanic powers have entrenched themselves in human minds and formed strongholds of human reasonings and lofty thoughts, which can only be overthrown by such weapons as are employed by the Spirit of God.

1 Thessalonians 1 and 2 give us a lovely picture of the **spiritual fruits** in the characters and lives of the converts, when the Gospel comes "not . . . in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." The Thessalonian believers became **followers** of the Lord, **ensamples** to all other believers, and **propagators** of the Word that had saved them; as they served the living and true God and waited for His Son from heaven.

2 Timothy 1 shows us the Holy Spirit as characterized by "the spirit . . . of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (7); so that the believer is enabled to be a "partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel according to the power of God" (8), and also to "keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us" the good deposit with which he has been entrusted (14). The Spirit of God is the power of **endurance** and for **fidelity**.

The gift of the Spirit on God's part, as well as the gift of His Son, may well be spoken of as "unspeakable" (2 Cor. 9: 15).

At the outset the power of the Spirit was very largely displayed in signs and wonders. Seeing that He is God and unchangeable, should it not be so to-day?

God is indeed the unchangeable One, but this does not mean that He cannot vary His ways and dealings according to His wisdom, as He meets the changing situations that arise amongst men. He has most evidently done so in past dispensations. The display of His power in miracles has never been constant, indeed only in **three** great epochs has it been manifested thus. First, when through Moses He

intervened to bring Israel out of Egypt and into Palestine, inaugurating the law system. Second, when He intervened through Elijah and Elisha, recalling the people to the broken law, and testifying of His goodness. Third, when He intervened in Christ, and the church was subsequently formed through the Apostles. Practically all the miracles that Scripture records come into these three periods. Of John the Baptist we read, "John did no miracle" (John 10: 41). His lot was cast just before the third great miracle epoch began in connection with Christ.

But are not these miraculous signs the very greatest display of His power?

By no means. Most of these visible displays of miraculous energy were only **temporal** in their effects. In Acts 9, for instance, Aeneas was raised up from his sick bed, and Dorcas from her bed of death; but in both cases the passage of years brought them into death, and the miracles were as though they had never been. That chapter opens with the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. His fellow-travellers were speechless with amazement, yet they do not seem to have discerned the miracle. It was of course a spiritual miracle of the first order, the effect of which is felt all over the earth today — just nineteen centuries later. Every true conversion is a miracle which abides **to eternity**; and miracles of this sort are taking place today.

Paul's preaching was in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Can we speak of modern preaching in this way?

Only in a very minor degree, we fear. The fact is that so much modern preaching is marked by the very things which Paul tells us he avoided, in order that his preaching might be in the power of the Spirit. He not only renounced the things of deceit and evil, as he tells us in 2 Corinthians 4: 2, but also things of a very reputable sort, such as excellency of speech, and wisdom according to man.

But even where the Gospel is faithfully preached, and that without reliance upon these human expedients, there does not seem to be much power manifested. How can we explain that?

There are two scriptures which may help to explain it — Ephesians 4: 30, and 1 Thessalonians 5: 19. All too often the Spirit is grieved in the servant of God who labours, and hence there is little fruit in what he does. And even when this is not the case, the Spirit is grieved by the state of things that prevails amongst the mass of professing Christians. There is also a quenching of the Spirit by the introduction of much human organization, which gives no place to His free action. Then beyond this there is the terrible incubus of unbelief, and often utter infidelity, on the part of multitudes of professed servants of God, who deny practically everything they are pledged to uphold. The Spirit is **grieved** and **quenched** in the bosom of the church, and this fact alone would account for His withholding any great manifestation of His power.

However, it is happily a fact that He is still working, and souls are being blessed, though His work is proceeding in quieter and less noticed ways.

Power for service, though important, is by no means everything. How may we know the Spirit's power for victory in our lives?

By walking in the Spirit, as Galatians 5: 16 bids us. We learn from Ephesians 1: 13, that He is given to us when we believe the Gospel of our salvation. He marks us off as belonging to God. But also

we are to **walk** in Him; that is, He is to be in a practical way the Source and Energy of our life and activities. Walking is the first and earliest activity of mankind, hence it becomes a figurative expression for our activities. Our thoughts, speech and actions are to be under the Spirit's control. Then we shall not be fulfilling the desires of the flesh, as otherwise we should. This is what Galatians 5: 17 says. The Spirit of God wields a power that is superior to the downward drag of the flesh; and we experience it, if we walk in Him.

Some of us would say that though we desire to "walk in the Spirit" we hardly know how to set about it. how does it work out practically?

Galatians 6: 7-9, may help to answer this. Our lives in a practical way are made up of sowing and reaping. It is as though we go forth each day with a seed basket on either side of us. We may put our hand into the basket of the flesh on that side and sow to the flesh, or into the basket of the Spirit on this side and sow to the Spirit: that is we may be yielding to the things which merely gratify the flesh, and so scatter the seeds of the flesh, or we may give ourselves to the things of the Spirit, and sow seeds that will be fruitful to His glory.

This is not something that God does for us, but what we do ourselves. All day long we are doing it in one or other of these two directions. In which direction does our choice lie? Into which basket are we continually placing our hand? The resolute **refusal** of the one, and the **cultivation** of the other, is the secret. That is the way to set about it.

Still, many a Christian who is not guilty of serious lapses in outward conduct, is not particularly marked by the liberty or power of the Spirit. How is that to be accounted for?

Such are probably marked by lack of concentration upon the things of God, or by positive laziness. They are easily diverted to things of trifling worth. The Spirit is here to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us, and He may be grieved by **inattention** or **sloth** on our side. If you went to an acquaintance with important tidings from a much roved friend, and in a few moments he were to interrupt your glowing story with irrelevant remarks about trivialities, or you found him inclined to sleep in his chair, you would cease your story, grieved and indignant.

The Spirit of God is sensitive as to that which concerns the glory of Christ. Inattention will grieve Him as well as open sin. Let us each ask God to show us how much of our spiritual poverty and powerlessness is to be traced to this.