

The Work of the Spirit

Exodus 32: 16; 2 Corinthians 3: 1-3.

Notes of an address in Edinburgh by F. B. Hole.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 15, 1923, page 127.)

It is a very sobering thought that for the carrying out of the purposes of God the work of the Spirit of God is as much an absolute necessity, in its own sphere, as is the atoning work of Christ. We certainly cannot do without Christ's finished work, nor can we do without the, at present, unfinished work of the Spirit of God. In the verses we have just read in 2 Corinthians, we find that there is a writing that is being inscribed in our hearts by the Spirit of the Living God. There is, of course, a great continuous work of our Lord Jesus Christ, a work which He is carrying on to-day, as it says in Matthew 16: "I will build My church," and this work He undertakes as the Son of the Living God. We rightly lay a good deal of stress upon that; He is the One that comes forth in the energy of life, and then it is He begins the work. He says "I *will* build My Church," since when He spoke that work was still in the future. Beyond death, in resurrection, He commenced that mighty work *as the Son of the living God*, and then there is *the Spirit of the Living God* and that Spirit is at work and, thank God, has wrought in our hearts — I trust we can say has wrought in the heart of each one of us here.

Now in connection with this, the verse in Exodus 32 is worthy of careful note, "The tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God," that is, it was Divine writing upon Divinely fashioned material. Now that always has to be the case. All must be of God. Our very hearts must be prepared by the Spirit of God. If there is to be any work at all of a permanent sort it must be His work.

If you turn to Ezekiel 36 verse 26, you will find that speaking of how He will presently gather Israel to their own land under the new covenant, God says, "A new heart also will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." The children of Israel, of whom we read so much in the Old Testament, were, as to their hearts, terribly like the stone on which the law was written. There was something very appropriate in the law being written on tables of stone, for though you can smash tables of stone, you cannot stretch them or twist them as though they were rubber. The law was written upon tables of stone and was as inflexible as the substance on which it was written. Alas! Israel proved itself to have a heart of stone. The material was not there upon which anything could be written, and so in this book of Ezekiel the Lord as it were says, "I am going to recreate Israel, I am going to work by My Spirit so that they shall be capable of receiving what I am going to write in a coming day." Consequently He is going to have some new material on which to write.

You find again the same two things in Corinthians: first you must have the material, and secondly you must have the writing done by the very Spirit of God Himself. So we find the Apostle saying in verse 3, "not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart." The Spirit of God has been at work in new birth, and there is in you a capacity to receive and retain the writing that He is about to write. Let me give you a very simple illustration. In my younger days I learned a lesson or two in connection with photography. You are going to take a photograph, and get all ready as you think for a good picture: the plate with its sensitized surface has been put in, as you suppose, and the exposure is made. Now, then, you go into the dark room, but what a disappointment! You pore over the developing dish watching the result. Alas! you have got hold of a simple piece of clear glass instead of the proper sensitized plate, and consequently there is no result whatever. You had a first-rate lens, a good camera, the subject was calculated to make a pretty picture, and the light was perfect, but there was no proper material on which

the light would write. There was not that which was capable of receiving the impression. The word photograph is derived from two Greek words, and means "writing by light."

God lets His light shine upon our hearts that He may write His writing, but you must have the right material upon which to do it, and unless the Spirit of God has been at work within you producing that "inward man" which is of Himself, there is not the "fleshy table of the heart" on which Christ can be written; you are like the clear sheet of glass. When the Spirit of God has wrought, then indeed there is a capacity for receiving the shining of the light, and that Christ may be written upon us. He is the One upon whom the light concentrates. He is the light.

Remember, the fact that you have received the grace of God is no credit to you; were it not for the gracious work of the Spirit of God your eyes would never have been opened; but now it is the work of the Spirit of God to write Christ upon your heart. That is the point of this passage here. Christ is to be written upon you. The world cast Him out. God says, I will write Him upon the fleshy tables of the hearts of My people. Alas, alas! how often the excellent inscription is blurred and indistinct with us.

I learned another lesson as to photography, when I was a boy, from a certain old gentleman. He took me into his dark room one day, and I watched with great interest as he was developing a photograph: very quickly the dark parts began to appear, but a few moments later everything became quite indistinguishable and we could not make it out at all, so we put it into a fixing bath and then held it up to the light. It was a picture indeed, but of a most confused sort. Heads appeared in all sorts of unexpected places; people and trees were mixed up in very awkward positions. What was the matter? "Ah!" he said, "I have taken two pictures on one plate!" It was a mix up, I can assure you. That is just like a great many Christians. They have been exposed to the clear shining of Christ; they have had the Word of God acting upon them, and then they go and very deliberately expose themselves to the world with its false light and seductive influences, and a strange mix up there is, like that plate which I remember so well.

Let us keep much in the light of Christ, for the work of the Spirit of God is to write Christ upon our hearts, so that consequently He may be seen in us and in all our ways. We need, therefore, to think much and often of Christ whilst not forgetting the work of the Spirit of God; that work which He carries on in our hearts. So we come to the last verse of this chapter in 2 Corinthians. You have Christ in glory, not a transient glory that shone in Moses' face, in connection with law and the Old covenant, the system of *demand*, but the abiding glory connected with grace and the New covenant, God's grand system of *supply*. Did you notice in that passage in Ezekiel, how God says, "I will," "I will"? It is God speaking of what He will do of Himself and for Himself. It is connected with a New covenant; not now God demanding of men what they ought to be for Him, but God saying what He will do for men Himself, and for His own glory.

According to the last verse of our chapter, we are, thank God, brought into the light of this glory. We look up by faith to that glory which tells of all that God is, of all that God is in Christ on our behalf. There is no veil over that glory as once was over the face of Moses. There is a transforming effect produced upon us, and thus is Christ written more deeply upon our hearts, that His likeness may be reproduced even in such as ourselves.

This is one of the great needs of the hour. It may be that we preach fairly clearly, but oh I that there may be a little more of this, a little more of the clear shining forth of the character of Christ written upon our hearts. Do you ever meet a Christian who strikes you at once as being Christ-like? It has a more powerful effect upon you than a good many eloquent sermons. That is the work of the Spirit of God. May we know more of Christ, and of this work of the Spirit, that we may be more like Christ.