

The Person and Deity of the Holy Ghost

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Section 4 of: **Musings on Scripture Vol. 3**

My Dear Sir,

I felt myself much drawn to you from the little intercourse we had on Sunday, so that the apprehension, as it grew upon me, of anything that might prove a necessary hindrance to further intercourse, I need not say, was painful to me.

I have since further meditated on the subject that was then between us, and have committed the guidance of my mind upon it to the Lord; but I feel only more confirmed in the judgment which I then had, and I have remembered the words of the apostle, "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them." — I desire now to write a little on the subject, as I promised you.

I believe the glory of God as He is, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, might have been learnt from the scriptures of the Old Testament. But I will instance only Isaiah 6. There the Seraphim cry, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts!" The New Testament scriptures show that Christ and the Holy Ghost might have been apprehended in the vision and audience, which the prophet then had: for, says St. John, referring to that chapter, "These things said Esaias, when he saw His (i.e. Christ's) glory, and spake of Him." And St. Paul, referring afterwards to the same, says, "Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers." (See John 12 41; and Acts 28: 25.)

But I instance merely this place; for I have no design to go into the divine testimonies to this truth which might be derived from the Old Testament. But when the work of the Son was accomplished, and He had risen from the dead, and was about to depart unto the Father, the full manifestation of God was made, for then the due time for this had come; and the commission to the apostles was this: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them unto the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

And this was just the time, as I have observed (as doubtless everything in scripture is perfect), for the revelation of this glory. The work had now been done by the Son which had been given to Him by the Father to do; and the Holy Ghost was about to be sent down to make that work effectual in and to the church. Therefore the saints were now to be brought into the knowledge of God, and baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

But so likewise is the church blest in Him, the benediction pronounced upon the saints formally and fully running thus — "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all."

And from these things, if we had nothing further, we know Him "with whom we have to do," to whose name we have been thus baptized, and in whose grace, love, and communion, we thus have our life and blessing.

But there is much more than this. The scriptures of the New Testament throughout assume that which the form in baptism thus distinctly declares. There is not the constant repetition of the already declared truth in a full formal manner; but there is the constant assumption of it, and the presenting of it in its moral power.

I will just instance the passages which, on the moment, without an effort occur to me.

"For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. 2: 18).

"And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (1 Thess. 3: 12, 13)

"And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ" (2 Thess. 3: 5).

"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1: 2).

"He saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3: 5).

In passages like these, the truth already declared in baptism is assumed and shown farther out in its moral power and relation to us: and we learn that as saints, we are vitally concerned in the actings of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And we are saints by thus knowing God (having fellowship with the power and grace of our God) through His own actings — the only way in which He ever can be known; for man's thoughts will never discover Him, and will therefore leave him but a worshipper of idols still. And this should teach the church of God that she dare not recognise any one who does not thus stand with her in the knowledge of God, to whose name we have been baptised, and with whose blessing we are blest. I am confining myself here rather to the doctrine of the word concerning the Holy Ghost; for that was the subject between us. We did not so much speak as to the Deity of the Lord Jesus.

As to the person of the Holy Ghost, I would then further say, that a full revelation of Him is made, not only in the Baptismal and Benedictory forms; but also, though in another manner, by our Lord to His apostles in John 14 - 16, and there, too, I would again say, in due time as we may thus see. When our Lord spake those words, it was just after He had told His disciples that He was about to be withdrawn from them. Such a declaration filled them (as it well might, for they had given up all companionship with Him, not as yet knowing Him in resurrection) with sorrow; and in these chapters He brings them the consolation. And the consolation He brings them was twofold. -

1st. — He tells them that His present departure was not final separation, but that He was going away only to prepare a place for them in the Father's house, and that He would return and receive them to Himself. This was great consolation, but this was not all; for -

2nd. — He tells them that in the meanwhile, while He was thus absent from them, and abiding with the Father, He would send the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, to be with them, and that He would do wondrous and blessed service for them, such even as His own presence with them could never accomplish. What this promised service of the Holy Ghost for the church was, I will not here detail: it is graciously spread out before us in these chapters of St. John, as well as in the other scriptures of the New Testament. But here it stood revealed by the Lord to His apostles, that the Holy Ghost was to be with them, and in them, when He Himself had returned, and was for a while with the Father. Such is the revelation of the person of the Holy Ghost to the saints, such the blessed promise from the departing Son of God, that the Spirit of truth should come to make effectual to their souls, the testimony which He the Son had given to the Father, and to seal upon their hearts all the life, and joy, and power of that calling, which had been prepared for them before the world was.

Here the church rests — here she abides in peaceful assured joy, knowing that God in all His

fulness is for her, that her security depends on no creature-strength, but that God Himself began, did continue, and is now ending her salvation; that what in covenant had of old been planned for her, God manifest in flesh had wrought out, and God the Holy Ghost is now making effectual, to the joy of all who believe. This is the blessed way in which, if I may so speak, scripture vindicates the Baptismal form; this is the way in which the name of God, there fully and formally published, is made known in life and power.

I would further say, that without this there would be the giving of God's glory to another. For not only is equal honour required for the Son (John 5), but the Holy Ghost stands with the Father and the Son, as we have seen, in the work which is doing for poor sinners, the divine work of salvation. The subjection of the Son to the Father, and again of the Holy Ghost to the ascended and glorified Son of Man, is abundantly exhibited in scripture, and more than exhibited, for we are instructed in the need of these things. The Lord says, "The Son can do nothing from Himself;" and again, speaking of the promised Comforter, "He shall not speak from Himself" (John 5: 19; John 16: 13); both passages intimating distinctly these subjections. And we learn the need of this wondrous and blessed economy. What could have cancelled the offence of Adam, the offence of a creature seeking to be as God? What could have preserved the honour of the throne of God while extending pardon to the seed of this Adam, but Jehovah's fellow being Himself smitten, and He that was in the form of God emptying Himself? This we learn was the needed way in which God could be just and the justifier of sinners (Rom. 3).

And what power less than that of God could make the work effectual to us? Having begun in God, are we to be made perfect in the creature? He that has been sent to be with the church, while travelling here in weakness and patience during the dreary night of her Lord's absence, is the Spirit Himself the Lord, who during that night is sought unto and trusted in to direct our "hearts into the love of God, and the patient waiting for Christ."

I know there may be perplexities in the thoughts of the saints at times on many of the great matters of revelation, and Satan is busy to corrupt the mind from the simplicity that is in Christ. But his advantages are gained, because he finds something in us. I am conscious of this. It is the god of the world that blinds the mind, it is the evil heart that departs from the living God. At the root of many of our difficulties there is a real, though it may be undetected, desire to keep God at a distance. Just (as has been observed by another), as with the children of Israel in the wilderness. It was not because the manna was not pleasant, for we are told it was as coriander seed, sweet as honey; but still they loathed it; and why? It came from the hand of God — it brought God too nigh to them. And in like manner, the world is at enmity with the doctrine of the cross; and why? It brings God too nigh to us; it brings Him to us in such an amazing light of love as overwhelms us; it is too much for the narrow heart of man; it rebukes his selfishness, and he seeks relief from it in the law of works. This is illustrated in the young man in Matt. 19. It was because he was covetous, that he was asking, "What good thing shall I do?" And so the Godhead of Him who now dwells in the church is a truth that in like manner brings God blessedly nigh to us.

I have not here so much spoken of the person of our Lord Jesus, because, as I have observed, this was not so much the subject of our conversation. But I would just observe, that the revelation of the Son, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, in the Godhead, is made to us also in the baptismal form; and in that particular (as in the other which I have above considered) all subsequent scripture vindicates that form, assuming the truth therein contained, and showing out its moral life and power. The work which the Lord has accomplished for the church, and the affections which the scriptures claim for Him from her, bring her before Him as God her Saviour. Some speak of a subordinate deity, of God in an inferior order; but the church knows no such mythology, as indeed I cannot refrain from calling it. "Hear, O

Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord;" and "the Son of God is come to give us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true; and we are in Him that is true, in His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5: 20, 21).

But the church has also learnt the subjection of the Son — that He said, in the volume of the book (in purpose, before the world was), "Lo, I come;" — that, like the voluntary servant in Israel (and how voluntary, if in any sense He had been debtor as an inferior?), He has had his ear bored for perpetual service (Ex. 21; Ps. 40; Isa. 50). Blessed be His name for such unsearchable riches of grace! But all this only verifies His true" deity, and verifies the revelation that He stands with the Father and the Holy Ghost in that name which is God, unto which, to know, love, and worship Him, we have been baptised.

I do not desire, dear sir, to multiply thoughts needlessly on this subject, though (I confess to you) it is not grievous; for it is sweet occupation to go over and over again those ever blessed revelations of Him who is ours in purpose and everlasting love, who has displayed His full name to us. But my direct purpose now is to show you the grounds why I assuredly judge that the church of God must, in order to her fellowship, require a confession to the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. This is God, because this is the revelation; for without revelation of Himself He is not to be known. No thought of ours will do anything more than (at their best) leave us refined idolaters. God must witness Himself to us; and that He has done in His actings for His saints in the work of their everlasting salvation; which actings have brought out to them that blessed One with Whom they have to do, in Whose name they have been baptised, with Whose blessing they are blest — Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

I would add here what I have omitted (for I have followed my thoughts very much, as I was led, without order), that the Holy Ghost is not personally put before us in the way that "the Father" and our Lord Jesus are in the New Testament generally. For the Holy Ghost is now in the church, the life of her worship, and the strength of her service; by His indwelling, He is making known to us the glory of the ascended Son (or His Lordship), and the Fatherly character and love of our God. Hence all the Epistles open somewhat in this way, "To the church. . . Grace, etc., from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." But in the Apocalypse, where the revelation was conveyed by the ministry of an angel, the salutation runs thus — "Grace be unto you, and peace from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven spirits which are before His throne; and from Jesus Christ the faithful Witness, the First-begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth."

But I will not go farther, dear sir. I had thought to have sent you this on — , but I have been unexpectedly interrupted. You will, I trust, believe that I have but the kindest thoughts towards you. You may judge me, after reading this, to be narrow-minded and bigoted, insisting on that which I have learnt by tradition from my fathers. But I do pray that this may not be your last thought upon it, but that you may stand in the confession of the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, with those who have, in every age of the Church since Jesus ascended and sent down the Holy Ghost, approved themselves as the saints of God, and witnessed and lived for their Lord in this evil world, and who have gathered all their joy and strength for present service, and all their confidence and ground of hope for future rest and glory, from the blessed and gracious God who has thus revealed His full name to them, and given Himself to them and for them. Yours, very truly (in the remembrance that Jesus is my Lord), J. G. B.