

The Gift of the Spirit and the Gifts

Acts 2: 33-38.

Lecture 6 of 'The New Testament Doctrine of the Holy Spirit.'

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The time was now fully come. God had made Himself manifest. Israel ought to have confessed today Messiah to be Emmanuel, even God *with us*. And faith should have seen in Christ dead and risen how God is *for us*. But He was now about to assume a new character, and to take an immense step in advance, even God *in us*. This could not be without the shedding of the precious blood of Jesus. Where that blood was sprinkled, the Holy Ghost could come and dwell. And therefore they gathered together, according to the word of the Lord, expecting, as He had said to them, to be baptized of the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

"When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." God introduced this new thing in a manner suitable to His own wisdom. Suddenly there came a sound from above, for it was the Holy Ghost coming down from heaven, and God was pleased to vouchsafe an outward sign accompanying this unprecedented fact — "a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." It is true that the Holy Ghost had descended before, but this was to dwell in one man — the man Christ Jesus. In His case there was no preparatory work; but the very manner of the descent of the Spirit, as well as of that appearance which He chose to assume in descending on the Lord Jesus, attested the immense difference between Him, in whom was no sin, and us, however blest and delivered. But we are delivered *from our sins and sin*; and this mighty work of God's grace is through the suffering unto death under judgment of Him who had no sin, and through the power of His resurrection.

For Jesus the Holy Ghost appeared in the form of a dove — a beautiful expression of self-adaptation on the part of the Holy Ghost toward that man whom He could come to and abide in without blood. That well-known emblem of purity the Holy Ghost could adopt in thus coming down to be in the Son of man. But in man's case — that is, the believers who were assembled in Jerusalem awaiting power from on high, as the Lord told them — the form was not as a dove, but tongues; cloven tongues, and as of fire also, were the suited image. Cloven tongues, because God now would send forth a mighty and far-reaching testimony. Whatever the responsibility of Israel, whatever the witness to be borne in that land and to that people, God, who knew the end from the beginning, had His eye on, and even in this very fact looked to, the spread of the good tidings, and the going out to Gentile as much as to Jew. The tongues were "cloven;" but they were "as of fire" also. There had been the judgment of sin in the cross. There was that in man which needed to be judged, and which, in fact, was judged of God already in Christ as the offering for sin. Hence the tongue as of fire was the witness that (whatever might be the display of the power of the Holy Ghost, and however evidently in the fulness of grace) it was grace, here as everywhere else where sin is concerned, reigning through righteousness by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hence, then, the Lord was accomplishing that for which He had been preparing the disciples. In

the different tongues to which men of old had been doomed in the just displeasure of God, His mercy was now about to reach them. The wonderful works of God were thus to be proclaimed to every nation under heaven. This attracted universal attention. All kinds of speculation as to this strange unheard-of phenomenon filled the ears and minds of men. But Peter explains how it was that which ought to be looked for according to the sure word of prophecy. He does not affirm that it was the fulfilment of Joel's declaration in its full and precise force; but it was "that which was spoken," and no other kind of thing. The *fulfilment* in any complete sense awaits another day. Nevertheless, it was not what ought to bear an evil name among men, but was rather to be weighed, accepted, and prized as of God. It was "that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh." It was only the principle of the prophecy; for, in point of fact, although there were these various tongues spoken, and although men were there from every nation under heaven, they were but Jews. Nevertheless, the languages embracing Gentile tongues though the persons might be Jews, there was in this the intimation to any discerning eye of what God was going to carry out in due time.

But there is a very important statement to be made at once, made, indeed, according to God's word, which we do well to heed and never to give up. There was not one thing only, but a variety in the display of the Spirit's power put forth on that day. We are not to limit what the Holy Ghost wrought to any one particular part of His operations. First and foremost, there was the accomplishment of the promise of the Father. There was the great and infinite truth of the Holy Ghost Himself sent down from heaven. Next there was the special assurance of our Lord accomplished in His baptizing them of the Holy Ghost, the effect of which was "one body." They might and did not yet know what the one body involved; indeed, I think I might be bold to say there was not so much as one believer who did. The doctrine of the body was as yet wholly unrevealed; it awaited another ministration and a suited servant of God, who speaks of himself as one born out of due time. In fact, it was not, and, one may say, could not be, duly, according to God's wisdom, revealed until the Jew had rejected the testimony of His grace. Then when the Gentile was actually called or in process of being called, the one body formed out of Jew and Gentile, joined together by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, could be brought out consistently with the ways of God. Still, that which was the power of this one body, that person who alone was adequate to form, was actually then and there given: "Ye shall be baptized of the Holy Ghost [without drawing out the consequences of it] not many days hence."

Then, besides this, there were to be signs and wonders wrought according to the prophet, and they were wrought. Further, there was the impartation of various gifts from the Lord for His work here below. "When he ascended up on high, he gave gifts unto men" — "some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers." This was clearly by the Holy Ghost, or, as it is written in 1 Cor. 12, "The manifestation of the Spirit was given to every man to profit withal."

All these distinct things, not in the least degree to be confounded one with another, were concurrently accomplished on that day. Further, the Spirit of God was given as the indweller to each one that believed. This was clearly a consequence of the same great truth. Thus we have what was individual and what was corporate, what was universal and what was particular, all made good on this day of Pentecost, but, nevertheless, each to be distinguished from the other. The epistles take up some one, some another part of this vast subject. We shall have a little more detail as to each on some future occasion; but what I wish particularly to dwell on tonight is the grand truth itself of the gift of the Holy Ghost, and this distinguished from any workings of His power by particular members. These gifts differ, but the gift itself is and must be the same Holy Spirit. There are many and wide differences elsewhere, but there can be none here; and this is manifest when the truth is understood that we speak

of a divine person, who comes down to dwell in each Christian and in the Church. It is evidently destructive of the truth for one to speak of differences in Him. There may be a variety of forms and measures in which His power is displayed; there may be and are different degrees in which the joy of His presence is entered into; but the fact remains, (and what can be more glorious and blessed than the fact?) that, as to Himself, He dwells equally in every believer who rests now on finished redemption in Christ Jesus.

Besides, there is also, as we know, the circumstance of His being not only *in us*, but *with us*. Accordingly, we find from the first and all through, that while the tongues of fire rested on each, there was also a rushing mighty wind which filled all the house. There was thus what may be called a double sign of the presence of the Spirit of God, — that which abode upon each person, but also that which in a general way filled the house where they were seated. Thus it is that we may see every now and then in this book of the Acts, without going farther, that the fact of the Holy Ghost being *there*, as well as the Holy Ghost being in each of *them*, is kept before the mind. For instance, when the house shook where they were, (Acts 4) what had this to do with the particular fact that the Spirit of God was in this or in that person? The Holy Ghost was there, and He made His presence felt in their midst. So, again, when Ananias and Sapphira lied, who can say that it was to any one believer more than another? It was "not to men," indeed, we are told, but "unto God," they had lied. But it was God present in the Church. It was God who had come down, who could now righteously, and according to His full grace, and the most blessed expression of that grace conceivable now for the earth, dwell even in those that not only had been sinners, but still had the deepest possible sense of what the natural evil was which they had inherited from Adam. But yet, in spite of all this, in spite of what they had been, and in spite of what they felt they were still, apart from Christ, so blessed was the grace of God in the gift of Him, so rich the manner of His love in the death and resurrection of the Lord, that the Holy Ghost could righteously, and for the glory of the Father and the Son, come down and be in them here below.

Hence it is we find all through that the Spirit of God is spoken of thus, not only as one that really dwelt in each believer, but that was with them when gathered together, or when acting in the work here below. Thus we read of the Spirit (Acts 8) saying to the evangelist Philip for instance, "Join thyself to that chariot." An angel of the Lord had previously told him the direction that he was to take. It was not, however, the angel, but the Spirit that spoke to him when it was a question of direct dealing with souls. The angel expressed merely the providence of God shaping his path for him: this, of course, still abides. We may not see angels or be conscious of their action, but it is just as true now as ever it was. And so with the Spirit of God. We may not hear Him as Philip did then; but the fact is as certain now as on that day. According to the promise of Christ He works. He waits, of course, for a suited state, though it be a state of heart which He alone can bring about; but He works as truly now as ever. So we find, a little later on (Acts 13), the Spirit said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul" to the work that He had called them. Thus we have most clearly the Spirit of God acting not merely in — for we are not told that it was in Saul or Barnabas that He wrought; and indeed the impression, I think, that one would fairly gather from the chapter is that it was outwards. That is, it was a word *about* them, not so much a word *to* them, still less anything working in them. We know, of course, that all these things are true in their season. The Holy Ghost really was in them, and was there before; but still, the Holy Ghost here displays Himself as a divine person who had come down, and was there giving effect to the work of grace and to the glory of the Lord. And so it is to be traced throughout the whole of the book, as we may readily see. So the Spirit of Jesus on another occasion directed Paul where to go. (Acts 16) I need not, however, multiply instances.

But there is another point of immense importance which is often a perplexity to souls, and that is,

the difference of the manner in which the Holy Ghost was conferred. Unbelief, especially where it takes the form of superstitiously exalting man (as, indeed, it constantly has this character, unless it take the still baser form of distrusting and denying altogether what is of God), works actively on these materials. But whether unbelief goes out in the exaltation of man as such, or in indifference to God and open utter carelessness as to all that concerns the soul, in both ways it is apt to take advantage of the various modes in which the Spirit of God was conferred, to deny that you can have the Holy Ghost now as of old, or to claim credit for some specific of religious quackery, in which alone one may infallibly look for the gift of the Spirit.

Now I shall for these reasons review the great occasions which the Holy Ghost records for our instruction, and hope to show, I trust plainly, to any man who is subject to the word of God, that there is nothing capricious in the manner in which the Holy Ghost was given, that there is nothing which gives the smallest importance to man as such, that there is nothing to weaken the confidence of the feeblest child of God, and that there is everything flowing from a full, or comparatively full, acquaintance with the revealed mind of God to comfort and steady the soul, enhancing our sense of His grace and wisdom; for we shall have abundant proof of His holy considerateness in all possible circumstances. What an evidence that simplicity in the things of God is the real secret of seeing things clearly! For simplicity is not occupied with our own things, or burdened by the thoughts of others, but has confidence in God, and knows that He has always before Himself His own grand design of bringing glory to Christ, who glorified the Father.

On the first occasion, the day of Pentecost, we have much the largest, and, in a certain sense, the richest form of the giving of the Holy Ghost from above. Therefore we do well to take especial heed to God's inspired account of it. We are informed by the highest authority, that Jesus "being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear." That is, there were palpable tokens before them, and evidenced by them, of the accomplishment of the promise of the Father. The promised Holy Ghost was not in itself a thing of sense, but, nevertheless, there was external power which accompanied it. This is of great importance to distinguish, because otherwise men are in danger, in consequence of the absence of these outward signs, of overlooking and denying that incomparable gift which was always above its effects. Whatever the importance of these signs, they were but the accompanying voucher to man of the gift and presence of the Spirit as a new thing upon the earth.

But further, we have considerable light as to this truth in the answer of Peter to the distressed enquirers at Jerusalem. In agony as to their state, finding themselves so plainly arraigned by the apostle as guilty of rejecting and crucifying their own Messiah, and that too in the presence of a God who had exalted Him to His own right hand, the apostle says to 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." Attentively weigh the words. He does not call on them simply to believe. There is, I need not say, the wisdom of God in using here the call to repent rather than to believe. There is nothing in vain in Scripture. The converse we hear on another occasion, where the apostles Paul and Silas called on the alarmed jailor at Philippi to believe rather than to repent.

Of course, my wish is not at all to produce the slightest perplexity in any soul, but, on the contrary, to remove it from the weak, who may see but do not understand this difference. It is not man that did or would have set down these words. God has written thus, and He is always to be trusted. We are not to suppose that it is a matter of indifference which is employed. Freely is it allowed and insisted on that, without faith, there never can be real repentance Godward. There may be a spurious faith, as there may be a spurious repentance. Wherever there is the one by God's power, there must needs be the

other. But still, every one knows from experience (and we see the same thing in God's own word — the key to all we know and experience) that there are differences in the manner in which the soul feels and expresses itself before God. For in one the deep moral work in the conscience more predominates; in another, peace and joy in believing would be more apparent. But still, there can be no real work in the conscience of spiritual value without faith, and there cannot be faith according to God without a genuine work of the Spirit in the conscience. If Peter calls on the Jews at Jerusalem to repent, so does Paul tell the men of Athens that God commands all men everywhere to repent. On other occasions both Jews and Gentiles were invited and urged to believe. The truth is, both repented and both believed; but there is ever a meaning, and an important meaning, where one is pressed rather than the other.

What was needed on this occasion — what was suitable according to God's wisdom — was the humbling of these proud Jews. Hence repentance, as that which puts down flesh and treats man as good for nothing, is put forward. "Repent," says the apostle Peter, "and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus" — that very man whom you crucified and rejected. There is the only source of blessing for any: He is the sole hope for your souls. They were brought down and made willing. It was the day of His grace, if not yet of His power according to Psalm 110. Grace had touched their hearts; it made them receive and endorse God's sentence against themselves. They could believe ill of themselves — the very last thing a man is willing to believe. They were really brought to that point that they were willing to believe themselves evil in the sight of God. He therefore presses this home. He does not take pity on them because they were justly pricked in heart, but he calls, so to speak, for the entrance of that which would humble them still more before God. Peter could press it the more readily, because he knew in Jesus such ample grace. As he says himself, "Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ." The more grace is proclaimed, the more we can afford to urge, and the more other souls can afford to bear; a thorough-going sound repentance. And, indeed, we need to enforce it, not leaving it vaguely and saying, "People must repent if they believe." This is not the way God does leave it. He causes them to feel their real state before Him. It is always a great blessing for any one, and if it be not charged home at an early day, let me say by the way, that a most humbling and painful process remains for the soul another day. For, instead of learning with simplicity what we are at the start of our career, instead of having as full a sense of our sin then as could be supposed compatible with so young a convert, there may be the need of proving it by a deep fall, by open sin, by flagrant departure from God, by a painful return, after having wandered the farther from Him, because there was so little sense of sin at the beginning of our Christian confession. How many a soul has known this! Perhaps I ought to add, that there are none, it seems to me, in greater danger from this omission than those with whom we have most commonly to do. The greater the sense of the Lord's grace, if there be not also a commensurate sounding of the conscience before God, the greater the danger, and more particularly for the young.

When in this case, then, the apostle exhorted them to repent and be baptized every one of them in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, you will remark what follows, — "*and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*" Surely when they repented, it was not without the Holy Ghost. When they received the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and found in Him remission, and were baptized thereon, — baptized in His name, which, of course, would be altogether worthless in these souls now before the apostle unless they believed in His name, — it will not be doubted that the Holy Ghost must have given them repentance and faith in His name. Therefore it is evident that the reception of the Holy Ghost as here spoken of, has nothing whatever to do with the bringing men to believe and to repent. It is a subsequent operation; it is an additional separate blessing; it is a privilege founded on faith already actively working in the heart. So far is it from being true that a man receives the gift of the Holy Ghost the moment he believes, that it may be well doubted whether there ever was such a case since the world

began. I do not mean to deny that the gift of the Holy Ghost may be practically on the same occasion, but never in the same moment: at least, I should like any one to produce me one proof from the word of God, or one instance from practical experience. I have never seen, nor ever heard of such a case, and (what is more) I believe that Scripture precludes the possibility of it. The reason is quite simple too. The gift of the Holy Ghost is grounded on the fact that we are sons by faith of Christ, believers resting on redemption in Him. Plainly, therefore, it supposes that the Spirit of God has regenerated us. We may find the importance of this remark in looking at some of the epistles on another occasion. Here I merely touch on the point, because it is very evidently involved in this very verse. Thus the gift of the Holy Ghost is not in order to repentance, nor to receiving Christ by faith. The truth is, that when the souls did repent, and when they were baptized in His name for the remission of sins, they received the gift of the Holy Ghost, as a subsequent privilege.

Another thing I would just observe, and one quite as momentous to bear in mind as any other: "the *gift* of the Holy Ghost" never means the *gifts*. There are many who confound the gift with the gifts. They are never mixed together in the word of God; they in no way convey the same thought. There is even a different word — not in our language, but in that which the Holy Ghost employed. The two things are invariably distinct. Both might of course be given on the very same occasion. A man might have the gift and enjoy the presence of the Spirit of God in his soul. He might also be empowered of the Spirit to carry out the gospel to the world, or be made a teacher or pastor in the Church. Still the gift of the Holy Spirit is another privilege altogether. It is the Holy Ghost Himself given, and not merely the power with which He invests a person for special purposes. There might be this too; but the gift of the Holy Ghost was that common blessing which was then and there conferred on every soul that repented and was baptized.

This is followed up immediately after by the glad reception, or, at any rate, by the reception of the word; for "gladly" is of doubtful authority. "They received his word." This is certain; and it may have been with solemnity, as much as with joy, as the characteristic feeling; and they were baptized in the name of their once despised Messiah. "And the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." And these are found full of the grace and power of God, as described in the latter part of the chapter.

Turning to the next great crisis, we have a wholly different scene. Stephen had borne his testimony, the result of which was utter rejection on the part of the Jews, — he full of the Holy Ghost, and they resisting Him. As their fathers did, so did they. Stephen sealed his testimony with his blood, and the persecution that broke out on him as its first victim scattered all the Church that was in Jerusalem except the apostles. The very men who had been called of the Lord to go out to all the world were the exceptions to the dispersion, and the only ones. So remarkably slow is man, even in the best estate, to enter into and carry out the purposes of God's grace. But God would carry them out, even if it were from a painful cause propelling. If love, if the power of grace, if the sense of the need of souls and of the glory of Christ, did not rouse those that were commanded, God would take care that feebler vessels, yet filled with the mighty tidings of His grace, should shed the sweet savour in all directions; and so they "went everywhere preaching the word." Among the rest, Philip, who had been appointed by the apostles, as well as chosen by the people, to take care of the daily distribution, now that this was summarily closed, gains a good degree, and goes about preaching the gospel. He visits the ancient rival of Jerusalem, even the city of Samaria. There the Jews, having entirely failed to establish the authority of the law, shrank into isolation, and had no dealings with Samaritans. They had not won their confidence, nor commended that form of knowledge and of the truth in the law which had been committed to their charge. But the gospel was now to prove its power where law had been unavailing;

and Philip preaches Jesus with such simplicity and force, and was so blest of God in it, that the whole city was filled with joy. Even the most wicked man that was there, long versed in the ways and wiles of the devil, was impressed by the holy influence which, it is true, had not penetrated his conscience nor governed his heart. But, at any rate, the current was too strong for him. Simon Magus bowed to the truth of the gospel, intellectually, at least, and was baptized with the rest. But, note it well, there was no gift of the Holy Ghost as yet to any there.

From such a fact we gather the clear distinction between the gift of the Holy Ghost and His working or operation, which enables a soul to repent and to believe the gospel. There is no question as to the mass of the Samaritan converts that they were real believers, though Simon was not. Nevertheless, the Holy Ghost "as yet was fallen upon *none* of them." It is not merely that they had not spoken with tongues, nor that there were no wonders done, save by the evangelist himself (verses 6, 7, 13). The Holy Ghost's coming down is a totally different thing, though accompanied by these outward expressions of His power. They must never be mixed up together as if they were the same. The greatest wound that could be inflicted on the standing capital truth of the presence of the Holy Ghost would be received by confounding them; because, if this were so, we have in this case no Holy Ghost any longer present, inasmuch as we have no more such outward displays of power. It is evident, therefore, that it goes far indeed in unbelief to mingle together signs and tokens by the Spirit with the Holy Ghost Himself. I repeat, that it was not merely that the powers had not been given, but the Holy Ghost had not yet come on them. The Scripture affirms it, and so it is said here, "When the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: 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."

At once we meet with a notable difference which stands out in marked contrast with the day of Pentecost. Then, when they repented and were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Ghost came upon them. Here He had fallen upon none, though they had believed and had been baptized. How comes this? I am persuaded for a grave reason and worthy of God. Had there been the descent of the Holy Ghost upon these believers at Samaria at the preaching of Philip, such is human nature that I cannot doubt the ancient rivalry of Samaria would have still remained. Samaria would have lifted up her head once more, and the very grace of the gospel would have been a support to her religious pretensions. It was true, Jerusalem had enjoyed this new and singular blessing; but had not Samaria it also? Thus Jerusalem and "that mountain" would have still reared their heads in opposition to each other, and the effect that God intended to produce by the presence of the Holy Ghost would have been altogether frustrated. Instead of bringing about oneness in love, instead of maintaining not only one head, but one energy, — one head above, and one power below working in one body as an answer to the glory of Christ, — there would have been a new Samaritan institution as well as a new society at Jerusalem. God made this impossible — at least impossible to one who heeded His ways. There was no appearance even of a sanction given to independency — the most destructive principle possible to the truth of the Church of God on the earth.

Accordingly, then, when the Church at Jerusalem, or, at least, when the apostles heard of it, (for the Church was now scattered abroad,) they sent down two of the chiefs, two that were pillars — Peter and John. They prayed; but there was even a closer intimation of what God intended by this delay in the gift of the Holy Ghost — there was the laying on of their hands; and this imposition of hands was both an act expressive of blessing from God through the apostles, and of identification, so to speak, with the work at Jerusalem. It was an attestation before the whole world that God would suffer no such thing as rivalry in His Church — that those who were the heads of the work in the one were quite as

indispensable in the other. Thus, then, God shows, as it seems to me in this very fact, that although there is a difference in the manner of giving the blessing, still that very difference is due to God's wisdom and care over our souls as really as in the gift itself. Of course, the gift of the Holy Ghost is the main part of the blessing, but then there is always the goodness and the wisdom of God in the smallest variation which His word puts before us. Thus, although we have here a very marked difference from the day of Pentecost, all contributes to prove how God loves us, how the Lord takes care of the Church, how, even in the manner in which He gives this supreme blessing of the Spirit of God, He proceeds in such a mode as to show, if saints are wise to heed His ways and seek to understand the method of His gifts, how He would arm us against our own nature.

There is another thing that comes before us in the next case. (Acts 10) Here we have a third variety. The apostle Peter is at length summoned of God, who was pleased to vouchsafe a two-fold witness of His purpose. Cornelius, the Gentile centurion, while he fasted and prayed in Caesarea, had an angelic visitor, who directed him to send for Simon Peter. As for the apostle himself, he fell into a trance the day after at Joppa, and saw thrice a vision about this great matter, that every word, as it were, should be established by three distinct witnesses. Peter, yet more encouraged by the Spirit (Acts 10: 19-23), yields to the messengers of Cornelius, and goes. When he opens his mouth, he calls their attention to that which was exceedingly prominent in his own mind; for he had gone unwillingly at first — had even ventured, so to speak, to dispute with the Lord in the vision of the great sheet. He had never, he said, eaten anything that was common or unclean when the Lord commanded him to kill and eat. But he had received repeatedly the reproof, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common;" and at last he had profited by the lesson. "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 with him."

In the first instance, then, it is plain that the call did not go out to a pagan idolater. Peter only speaks in this case of one that already feared God and wrought righteousness. This was the case with Cornelius. He was not an unconverted soul, but one who really feared God. He abounded in prayer and in almsgiving. Certainly self-righteous prayer or alms could not have commended him to God. Such things, when done as a means of rendering some atonement for the soul before God, are (we know) among the unholy resources of unbelief. But Cornelius was a God-fearing man — this really, and not in mere outward profession. He was regenerate, and God had signified his estate and his acknowledgment of his righteousness in the message of the angel, which it seems to me perfectly impossible to understand as meaning that he was merely an outward professor of the true God — the most hollow thing conceivable even in the sight of men, and always an abomination in God's eyes. As I read the account afresh, I am bold to say his state was that which the Lord had wrought, and which He distinctly owns as pleasing to Himself. And it was wise of the Lord and most gracious, that, in going out to the Gentiles, He should begin with such an one as not even a Jew could deny to be godly. It was, beyond a doubt, infinite mercy which was about to save the evidently lost, the chief of sinners. But still the point here was not awakening for the first time a soul from its death in sins, but rather setting one already awakened on a known ground of relationship with God and perfect liberty, so that none who feared God and His word could gainsay his title. In most cases the two things might coalesce; but this was not the case with Cornelius, who in due time, with his household, hears the word from Peter.

Observe, it was a word, too, that was not heard for the first time. "That word ye know," says Peter, "which was published throughout all Judea." Plainly, therefore, this centurion had not only feared God, and prayed to Him before, but was aware of that which was preached through out all Judea. How was it that it had not been received in its fulness and applied to his own soul? Just simply because he was one that feared God and trembled at His word. It was not the shape in which faith in

God would work now, but it was right in its season. This reverence for God would make him slow to anticipate His ways. "If God had sent out his word for Israel," he would say, "I know it is sure for them; and blessed are the people that have such a God! But who and what am I?" For this very reason he waited till the word was sent to himself. This is just what the gospel does now. It is the proclamation of the word of God's grace to every creature; but it was a new thing then. He was acquainted, of course, with the ancient Scriptures, and did not doubt the promises. There was no question about them as an abstract truth, or in their accomplishment by and in Christ for Israel.

But now the word was sent to him, Cornelius a Gentile, by the authority of God through Peter. As we are told here, "While Peter yet spake these words," (more particularly, I suppose, "to him give all the prophets witness, that through his name *whosoever* believeth," etc.) this truth was fastened on his soul. At least, this is direct testimony, and opens the door to any one according to all the prophets: "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! Without baptism? without imposition of hands? without prayer for them? Yes, without any of these things, without more ado, at once, even while the very words are being preached by the apostle Peter, the Holy Ghost is given to them all.

Here, then, is a new phase, altogether different, not merely from what was witnessed in Samaria, but even from what had been experienced in Jerusalem. There the Jew must be baptized, and only then *he* should receive the Holy Ghost. It was not enough that he should believe the gospel; he must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, (baptized with water, of course,) "and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." At Samaria, not only had they been baptized with water, but there must be prayer and the laying on of the apostles' hands, without which the Holy Ghost came on none there. Here, before baptism, and without apostolic imposition of hands, the Holy Ghost fell on *all* of them. How came this to pass? The only wise and the only good God owned these Gentiles in deep grace. The moment was come to carry out His mind more fully, and the first display of His grace towards them was in this rich and singular process. It might not be so public an occasion as when three thousand souls were brought in. Still, what was seen then was the breaking down of Jews that had been hard and high-minded against Jesus of Nazareth. To that name they must bow, nay, they must be baptized in it; not otherwise could they receive the Spirit. The Samaritans, again, had their special lesson, to counteract their peculiar propensity, and to establish the grand principle of the Church or assembly, (not churches merely,) which God was forming on the earth. But here God would encourage and win the Gentiles that Peter himself had despised. For after the Lord had told him that he was to go and make disciples of all the Gentiles, he went not; after even the Church was driven to speak, he lingered. They were slow (may I say?); they were staying behind the work of the Lord; they had little entered into His mighty grace, so far transcending the thoughts of His own children, but now manifested with little heart on man's part, yet led on by God's hand (for it was scarce more than this until Peter was actually brought to the spot). But when he preached at Caesarea, how God rebuked — though it might be in the fulness of mercy — the slowness of His servant! When the words fell from his lips, not even Jerusalem had ever seen such mercy, nor had Samaria witnessed anything like it; for there had been, in God's wisdom, a pause there, and an imposition of apostolic hands before the full blessing was imparted.

But here was nothing of the sort. Here it was all of pure grace. Of course, there was an antecedent work of the Spirit in their souls, giving them repentance toward God and faith in Jesus. *This* is always necessary. But there was no outward act to be done by others and submitted to by themselves. Baptism followed as a privilege (as it really is) which could not be refused them. For the Jew, for the Samaritan, humiliating elements were not absent. For the Gentile, on the other hand, there was sweet

encouragement. God was winning them, and would stop the mouth of every gainsayer. He was giving, in the manner of the gift, the most magnificent proof that, if He went out to the most distant, He shows for that reason the more grace; — no mercy so rich as that which sought and found the poor Gentiles.

And mark it well, brethren, it is thus that we receive the Holy Ghost. We come under the Gentiles. We are not Jews; we are not Samaritans. Let others boast, if they will, of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven: would that they did boast of what was done on the day of Pentecost, and among the Samaritans afterwards! No apostles were called to lay their hands on the Gentiles. Peter, not a whit behind the chiefest, and one of those who had laid his hands on the Samaritans, was there; but the fact of his presence at Caesarea made the grace of God the more conspicuous. He declared the astonishing news to all; but there was no room for him to do anything more. It was no question of man's preparatory action, either in laying on of hands, or even in baptizing. Nothing of the kind was done before the Spirit was given, although the apostle Peter was there to baptize and lay on hands if necessary. Circumstances, therefore, did not prevent, had this been God's order. Man, so to speak, disappears in the overflowing grace of God. And how blessed that there it is we find our blessing and proper place before God! In this God has given us a full adequate answer to all the efforts of men, who insist on the necessity that we should have apostles when there are none. Unbelief despised the apostles when they were here; unbelief assumes their presence now to be indispensable, as the sole channel for the impartation of the Spirit, when the channel is nowhere to be found. How good of the Lord, that He should leave us in His own written word the proof that these men understand not what they say, nor whereof they affirm! Let others, if they will, put themselves back in what, no doubt, suits them — the place of Samaritans or Jews. Let them say they are Jews when they are not. But the Lord gives those who are content to own themselves mere sinners of the Gentiles His richest mercy. Would that those who are still cleaving to forms and ordinances, to channels of one human sort or another, might be brought down to their true place, that (willing to be, as they really are, nothing) they might be blessed fully according to the heart of God! Thus it was that God then blessed; and thus it is that He ever loves to bless. It becomes us, then, to make much of His grace. As the apostle said he magnified his office, so I think we should magnify the grace that deals thus divinely with mere outcast Gentiles as we naturally are. We may say much of Him who can thus afford to bless such as we are; for if such was His blessing then, the ground is not changed, and such it is still. I say not that there is the same kind of evidence, but that such is the revealed principle of God's blessing the Gentiles. How is it, if you bow to the testimony of God going forth in the earth — how is it that according to Scripture not Jews, but Gentiles, received the Holy Ghost? It was through the preached word. Is it not now through the same medium — the word of His grace?

There may be, no doubt, a delay in some cases. You may find souls really touched of the Spirit of God — I do not mean merely their feelings, or any passing emotion, but a real work of grace in the heart and conscience — and yet the person may have no peace, no settled rest and liberty, in the Saviour. This is not uncommon. Are we, therefore, to deny a work of God? Are we to ignore this part because there is not all we might and must desire? Are we to say that, if there be not full deliverance before God, there is nothing at all? This I leave to others; for myself I dare not think or say so. I entreat my brethren that none among them may yield to such unbelief. I hope that no one here will think it necessary to question the reality of God's work in a soul, because it does not yet enter into the full and simple sense of all Christ has done for it. We may be sometimes in haste with souls, and may injure them deeply if we do not accredit God's work.

But there is another point of danger also. Let us not rest satisfied because a person is truly penitent, and looks to Christ, unless he be brought into liberty. This is equally unbelief, and a want of

acquaintance with the word and grace of God. It is to stop short of the full presence and operation of God's Spirit in the soul. We must call things by their right names. One may be but miserable through a sense of sin and anxieties which have not found their answer by God's grace in redemption. But still, when the heart yearns after Jesus, although by no means in peace of conscience and still less of heart, this we *ought* to call conversion, and to treat it as God's own gracious work. But to settle down in such a state would be equally wrong — to suppose it enough because a soul turns from sin to God, because hating himself he also looks to Jesus. For it is more a grasping after Him than any positive peace in Him, and very far from the fulness of the blessing of the gospel. On the contrary, we ought to press, that there is much more in Jesus than merely what awakens the heart and touches the conscience, however real the sense of sin may be, and desire after what is of God. We all, I believe, fail if we do not insist that such an one is not yet in what Scripture recognizes as the true Christian state before God. If His word supposes His children to be fully at peace, ought we to be satisfied with anything less? A renewed mind, but still under law, we ought never to recognize as the full result of the truth in Jesus, though bound to recognize it as true so far as it goes. But there is much more that God intends for His own — even such a place of blessing where doubts, fears, anxieties, all melt away in the sense of the perfect grace which has brought us nigh to Himself without a sin or a question before Him.

It is evident that, while there is conflict and inward trouble, the state of feeling is that which was found in the Old Testament saints. The only difference is, that *they* could not get beyond it. The time was not yet come. The Deliverer was not there. The deliverance had yet to be wrought. The blessed ground which makes it a matter of faith to receive peace through the grace of God was not laid before them, and God's ways cannot be anticipated. We cannot run before Him. We may follow after Him, and should delight to see His goodness as it passes before us; but we cannot anticipate God. But now salvation is come. Christ has been here, and died and rose; yet still quickened souls do not always apprehend the mighty results in a day. It may be, of course; and I do not doubt we have still cases such as the Philippian jailor referred to. The very same hour the man's conscience was reached, there was a further work of God, which left himself and his house rejoicing. As miserable as he could be just before, in the same hour he was thoroughly happy by divine grace. So I do not in the least deny that this may now be in the course of an hour, though far from thinking that it is so common a thing as is supposed.

Take the apostle as an instance. Surely he was converted, if ever a man was, on the road to Damascus, and in most extraordinary power too. Yet manifestly God did not bring him into full liberty all at once. He was for days and nights so exercised that he neither ate nor drank, but was blind; and all this was in keeping with his spiritual state. He had really seen Christ in glory, and this for his soul; but had he yet been brought into the peaceful enjoyment of all? I do not doubt that there was another and an immediate work, the fruit of the truth dealing with the inner man; still, until Ananias comes to him, when he was baptized, he was far from full rest and liberty. The Holy Ghost, as we know, filled him, and then, as it is ever, he enters consciously into the full blessing. This does not take away from the fulness of the gospel any more than from its freeness; but it leaves room for meeting the actual facts, and it accounts for a state in which we find souls, which, after all, can never be bent into a theory. There are stubborn facts which meet the eye every day, even without looking for them, if we are in earnest about souls. Take notice of them, no matter where, and you will learn that there is a real action of the Spirit of God with the soul, and that one may even go on in this condition for days, weeks, months, and years. It is not infrequently after this that the soul is brought into perfect liberty before God. Where one enters into liberty, there is, in my judgment, not life only, but the reception of the Holy Ghost.

Another word I would just say before leaving this part of the subject. Wherever God does begin the work, He always finishes, though not all at once. That there is no person, therefore, who ever dies with the work incomplete, is my firm conviction, according to the word of God, and, of course, confirmed by all I have ever known in experience. That is, whenever God creates anew, He most surely gives them the Holy Ghost. I do not believe it is always at the first, because, in fact, Scripture plainly to my mind proves the contrary; but he whom God undertakes to bless now, will undoubtedly, sooner or later, be brought into the full simple enjoyment of peace with Himself. I am not speaking, you will observe, of intelligence. If this were the case, it would be indeed a most sorrowful reflection how few are to be found. We all know how miserable truly pious souls may be for years and years. But it has never been my lot to see one of those who was not made happy before the Lord took them to Himself; and, indeed, I have seen marvellous instances of the complete rolling away of all anxieties and questions, which had clouded a lifetime, even where there was life; and I do not doubt that others have seen as much, perhaps more. They have seen the grace of God at length remove all clouds from the soul. But do they associate this with its real cause? From what has been before me then, I conclude that, whenever a soul is quickened by the Spirit of God, or converted, which substantially means the same thing (only from another point of looking at the work of the Spirit), it will eventually have the gift of the Holy Ghost; but it may have to wait because of no present submission to God's righteousness.

We may observe that on the occasion at Caesarea baptism follows. The apostle Peter draws attention to the fact, that not only did the Holy Ghost fall on them as on the Jews at Pentecost, but the people spoke with tongues; there were the same undeniable tokens of that great gift. And this was of great importance, as it stopped the lips of the brethren of the circumcision who accompanied the apostle. When he heard them magnify God, "Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water?" He knew perfectly well how the prejudice of the Jewish brethren would work. It was a new thing too — that Gentiles should be baptized with water. "Can any man forbid water, that these should be baptized, *which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?*"

Observe another fact (which, indeed, Scripture abundantly proves elsewhere), that baptism was never meant to be the prerogative of an official in the Church. Peter was there. Had it been a question of superior dignity, surely an apostle could have baptized them. The plain, simple inference of the language is, that the act was not his personally. He took care that they should be baptized; for he commanded them to be baptized; but it is nowhere said that he baptized them himself. So Paul was glad to record about his work at Corinth, thanking God that he had not baptized any, except a very few. Peter, I do not doubt, was here led of God, although for a different reason, to abstain from baptizing. Had it been otherwise, how men would have seized on the circumstance? what endeavours to extract from it something to glorify man where God was working for His own praise? But it was not so. Even the blessed apostle Paul was baptized by a simple disciple; and surely, if there had been anything involved in the person that baptized, we might expect it peculiarly guarded, when an apostle was the subject. But Ananias, at God's word, goes and says "Brother Saul," and baptizes him at once. There was no waiting for an official personage. Is it not a wonderful proof of men's unbelief, that they should overlook and explain away a fact so patent and overwhelming? Do moderns or ancients flatter themselves that they can improve on Scripture? Do they know, or can they impart the will of the Lord for His servants and the Church better than the inspired writers? There is no warrant from God for making ministers of the gospel the only persons competent to baptize. The greatest care is taken to prove the contrary; and this too when it was no question of necessity. There was no need of seeking one in high office for Cornelius: for an apostle was on the spot. Had due order, according to God, called for any such form as men have urged since, why was it omitted on so grave an occasion, which could not but be a precedent for all time to come to those who are ruled by apostolic example? As Paul, so the

Gentile centurion and his household were baptized by those who, now-a-days, would be designated as laymen. Apostles and evangelists sometimes did baptize; but it was in no way regarded as an official rite: other brethren might and did baptize, even when the apostle was present. But this by the way.

There remains but one case more, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, on which I must say a few words for my present theme. "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? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, 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. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied." (Acts 19: 1-6.) This is an instance not less remarkable than any we have examined, and quite clear in its import. The apostle no doubt, perceived a certain want of ease in these "disciples," which induced him to enquire whether they had received the Holy Ghost since they believed. Then there is — certainly there was in the apostle's mind — such a thing as receiving the Spirit after believing. He does not question the reality of their faith; he had reason to ask whether they had received the Holy Ghost since. And their answer is equally plain: "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." They did not plead ignorance, as is sometimes ignorantly inferred, of the Spirit's existence. The question was about believers receiving the Holy Spirit. This was an ancient promise; and John the Baptist (with whom they had connection more or less close) did not more surely testify of a Messiah quite imminent, yea, in the midst of Israel, than of His baptizing with the Holy Ghost, and not with water only, as he himself did. In fact, every reader of the Old Testament knew, not only of the existence of the Spirit, but of God's gracious promise, that He should be poured out in the last days; and of all teachers John had most strongly pressed on his disciples that Messiah would be the instrument of this wondrous work and favour among men. But they did not somehow know that the promise was now in course of accomplishment, that believers among Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles had already received the Spirit, through the hearing of faith, and not through works of law.

The apostle proceeds to ask them unto what they had been baptized; which drew forth the reply, that they knew no more than John's baptism. This elicited a weighty explanation: John had not gone farther than the baptism of repentance. He did insist on that self-judgment which the Spirit alone produces in souls that bow to God's word, and which detects their moral ruin in His sight. The power which is founded on redemption, which cannot dwell in him who is a sinful man till the blood is shed and sprinkled as a groundwork, as it were, for His own indwelling power, (which thereon links the ransomed and delivered soul with Him who has won the victory, and leads it victoriously too through an evil world,) was not yet bestowed. John could only tell the people that they should believe on Him who was coming after him — that is, on Christ. Paul preached a Saviour who had already come, and had effected redemption. "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 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 were not lacking; but they are confounded with the gift of the Holy Ghost no more here than in any of the other instances. These disciples were baptized with Christian baptism: the baptism of repentance did not suffice for them. They were baptized unto His name who died and rose again. And thereon they received the Spirit, but even then not without the imposition of Paul's hands. Thus, if God had put honour on Peter and John at Samaria, not less did He uphold the

apostolate of Saul of Tarsus. And it is to be observed also, that as the two apostolic delegates had been thus owned, not in Jerusalem, but in its religious rival, Samaria, so Paul laid his hands not on Gentiles converted through his preaching, but on disciples already baptized with John's baptism.

There is nothing therefore in this to produce difficulty, or weaken the tenor of what I have already sought to expound with all simplicity from the word of God. The two instances where apostles, one or more, laid their hands on believers, in order that they might receive the Spirit, were exceptional and ancillary to the chief occasions where we hear of no such act done by the apostles. In one of these, the greater, instances (the dealing with the Jews at Pentecost), Scripture is entirely silent as to imposition of hands in any case; and there assuredly was none to lay hands on those who first received the Holy Ghost that day, whether the apostles or the rest of the hundred and twenty: God reserved this gift that it should come direct from His own hand. In the other kindred case, we know for certain that hands were *not* laid on the believers before the Spirit was given them; and this is the more momentous to us, inasmuch as it was the case of Cornelius and his household, under which type, of course, we, as Gentiles, properly fall. The conclusion, therefore, is irresistible. Even if apostles did exist, they are not needed to lay hands on us, or any other Gentiles who believe, in order that we may receive the Holy Ghost. Not thus, according to His word, did God give His Spirit to the uncircumcision. Believing on Christ through their word, we have shared the blessing, even as our prototypes at Caesarea.

The Lord be praised, not only for His Spirit, but for the written word, which makes manifest the folly of pretentious men, reprobate concerning the faith, who seek to alarm the timid and to embolden the superstitious. May we hold fast, according to the faith of God's elect, the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie promised before the world began.