

THE
THEOLOGICAL WORKS

OF THE
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CONTAINING
THE FORCE OF TRUTH,—TREATISE ON REPENTANCE,—GROWTH IN GRACE, SER-
MON ON ELECTION AND FINAL PERSEVERANCE,—SERMONS ON SELECT SUB-
JECTS,—ESSAYS ON THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECTS IN RELIGION, AND THE
NATURE AND WARRANT OF FAITH IN CHRIST.

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ESSAY XIV.

On the Gifts and Influences of the Holy Spirit.

THE doctrine which is selected for the subject of the present Essay, has *occasioned* a great variety of dangerous or destructive mistakes. Some persons have advanced claims, which seem at least to place them upon an equality in this respect, with the prophets, apostles, and inspired writers; and others, (perceiving the absurdity or arrogance of such pretences; deeming themselves wise, strong, or good, by their native powers and exertions; and having no experience to direct them in discriminating between what is Scriptural and what is anti-scriptural) have argued, that we neither want, nor are warranted to expect any such influences: that they were exclusively vouchsafed to the apostles and primitive Christians; and that all, which is now spoken of the operations or assistance of the Spirit, is mere enthusiasm and delusion. These opposite extremes have also admitted of intermediate errors and variations; whilst some contend, that there is no discoverable distinction between divine influences and the actings of our own minds; and do not clearly admit of an exception, in respect of the diverse effects produced by these distinct causes; others suppose, that they are immediately distinguishable by an inward and a kind of instinctive consciousness, (like that which doubtless assured prophets of their divine inspiration); and thus, whilst they seem to honour the Spirit, and will attempt nothing, till, as they say, they are moved by him, they covertly advance a claim to infallibility and perfection, in those favoured seasons, or impute all their mistakes and follies to this sacred Agent. Nor is it uncommon for men to plead that they are influenced by the Holy Spirit, in order to establish other rules of faith and practice than the written word of God, to bring that, or some parts of it, into a measure of discredit; or even to substitute something wrought in or by them, in the place of the righteousness and atoning blood of that Saviour, whom he, the Spirit, is sent to glorify among men. In short, much enthusiasm and spiritual pride, and many fatal or disgraceful delusions have, on the one hand, arisen from misapprehensions of this subject; and, on the other, multitudes have taken occasion from these things, to treat the whole doctrine with the most profane contempt and derision.

But a careful attention to the Scriptures, and to the ends for which the Holy Spirit was promised, may enable us properly to discriminate in this matter; and to show in what sense, and for what purposes, we ought to expect and depend on the influences of the Spirit, and which of his gifts and operations were peculiar to the primitive times, or to such extraordi-

nary occasions. I shall therefore at present offer some thoughts on the miraculous gifts and powers imparted by the Holy Ghost;—on those ordinary endowments which uninspired men may reasonably expect to receive from him; on his common influences upon the minds of many unconverted persons; —and on the special nature of those influences which he vouchsafes, and of that sanctifying work which he effects on “the vessels of mercy, prepared before unto glory.”

If we accurately mark the language of the Scriptures, we shall find that the Holy Spirit is spoken of as the Author and Giver of all those miraculous and supernatural powers with which any of the human race ever were endued. Not only did “holy men of God speak as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,” (2 Pet. i. 21); not only did apostles, evangelists, and primitive believers receive the Holy Ghost, to enable them to cast out devils, heal the sick, raise the dead, speak in languages before unknown, or to interpret the discourses of others: but even Christ himself was “anointed by the Holy Ghost,” to work his beneficent miracles, (Acts x. 38): he cast out devils by “the Spirit of God,” (Matt. xii. 28); “who was not given to him by measure,” (John iii. 34): and through “the Holy Ghost he gave commandments to his apostles,” (Acts i. 2). Indeed the promises made to him, in the Old Testament especially, relate to this; and his very title of the *Messiah*, the *Christ*, the *anointed* of the Lord, was derived from it, (Psalm xlv. 7; Isaiah xi. 2, 3; xlii. 1; lix. 21; lxi. 1). Nor can we easily and satisfactorily account for these expressions, or reconcile them with our Lord’s conduct in speaking and acting, as in his own name, or by his own authority and power; unless we advert to the distinction between his divine and human nature, and his personal and mediatorial dignity; and remember that in respect to his divine nature, he is one with the Father, and with the Holy Spirit, in all the essence, perfections, and operations of the Godhead. We must therefore consider the Holy Spirit as the great Agent, according to the economy of the everlasting covenant, in the inspiration of the Scriptures, in the performance of all those miracles, by which the messengers of God authenticated their doctrine, and in the revelation of those future events, which being interwoven with every part of the sacred volume, and receiving their accomplishment from age to age, confirm the divine original of the whole to every attentive and impartial inquirer. Such discoveries of the truth and will of God had been made from the beginning: but they became more particular and copious when Israel was brought out of Egypt, and the law was given by Moses. The prophets, and other servants of God, who from time to time were raised up to call the attention of Israel to his law and promises, or to effect extraordinary deliverances for the nation, were endued with miraculous powers by the same Spirit: at the coming of Christ, Mary, Elizabeth, Zacharias, Simeon, &c., spake of him by the Spirit; and his apostles and seventy disciples partook of

his extraordinary gifts, and miraculous powers, even before our Lord's crucifixion. Yet the out-pouring of the Spirit, at and after the day of Pentecost, was so vastly superior in energy, extent, and duration, that St. John who had witnessed and shared both, says, in relating the discourses of Christ, "this he spake of the Spirit—for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified," (John vii. 39). Whatever had preceded that great event, might be an earnest of, but did not properly belong to "the dispensation of the Spirit," nor was worthy to be compared with it. But when Jesus was risen, and ascended on high, these gifts were showered down on men in rich abundance, to confirm the testimony of the apostles to his resurrection, and to qualify them and their fellow-workers to spread the gospel through the nations; and being communicated by the laying on of the apostles' hands, the number of witnesses and instruments was continually multiplied, and provision was made for the rapid progress of their salutary doctrine.

The evident design and use of these extraordinary influences of the Spirit was to rouse the attention of a careless world to the spiritual doctrines of the gospel; to counterbalance men's prejudices in favour of their old traditions, and against religious innovations; and to put honour on those who were employed to propagate Christianity in the midst of contempt and persecution. The gift of tongues especially seems to have been indispensably necessary, to enable the first preachers of the gospel to address men of different nations in a suitable manner; and the difficulty of learning the languages of heathen nations, forms, at this day, one grand impediment to the propagation of Christianity. These miraculous powers seem to have continued with the church, in some measure, during the three first centuries; but to have decreased in proportion as the Christian religion obtained establishment in the world. At length, when "the only wise God our Saviour," saw that occasional prejudices had sufficiently subsided, and extraordinary obstacles were in a great degree removed; and that the truth had only to contend with those lusts of man's fallen nature, and those efforts of the powers of darkness which are common to every age and place; he was pleased to withdraw these miraculous operations, and to carry on his work by means of the written word, the fulfilment of prophecies, and other abiding evidences of the truth, and by the ordinary influences of the Holy Spirit. But it does not appear that he hath any where declared, that he will no more endue his servants with miraculous powers, or confer on them the spirit of prophecy. We may however be assured, that such powers will never be imparted to enable men to support any thing materially different from that complete revelation which we now possess: and for thirteen hundred years at least, all pretences to miracles or prophecies have tended, in one way or other, to subvert the doctrine contained in the New Testament; and have

justly been deemed impostures, or satanical delusions, and marks of anti-christ. We allow therefore, that *in this respect*, the promise of the Spirit related to the primitive times, or at least, that all claims at present to such powers, as imply new revelations, predictions, miracles, infallibility, &c., in those who advance them, are enthusiastic, arrogant, and unwarranted.

The Scriptures are fully authenticated, as a complete rule of faith and practice: Christianity has all the advantages which it can possess, in a world that “lieth in the wicked one;” there is no rival system, pretending to be a divine revelation, that can at all stand in competition with it; ministers may obtain needful qualifications, by the ordinary blessing of God on their diligent studies; the establishment which our religion has had for so many ages, and through so many nations, gives it, as it were, a claim by prescription, to the attention of mankind; and the Lord sees these things to be sufficient for the accomplishment of his purposes, in the present state of human affairs.

We may further observe, that miraculous and prophetic powers, imparted by the Holy Spirit, had no inseparable connection with personal sanctity; and they have often been bestowed on very wicked men. Balaam might, in a measure say with David, “The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue,” (Num. xxiii. 5, 16; xxiv. 2, 16-21: 2 Sam. xxiii. 2). Judas doubtless was endued with the power of casting out devils and working miracles, as well as the other apostles; and many will be condemned as *never known* of Christ at the last day, who have done many wonderful works in his name, (Matt. vii. 22, 23; 1 Cor. xiii. 1-3). These gifts were likewise liable to be abused by man’s ambition and corrupt passions; and however useful to others, were injurious or even fatal to the possessor, if he were not disposed and enabled by the more common, but far more valuable influences of the Holy Spirit, to use them in humility, zeal, and love, (1 Cor. xii. xiv.)

But there are also other gifts derived from the same Spirit, which are not directly of a sanctifying nature. It is observable, that John the Baptist, who was “filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother’s womb,” wrought no miracles: yet our Lord declared, that “he was more than a prophet;” and it is evident, that he was more illuminated in the nature of Christ’s redemption and kingdom, than any of the apostles were, previous to the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. His divine illumination, therefore, according to the Scriptures of the prophets, and his ministerial endowments, though not miraculous, were yet the gifts of the Holy Ghost. The apostles and disciples, on the day of Pentecost, were not only endued with miraculous powers, but greatly advanced in their knowledge of the gospel, delivered from their prejudices and mistakes, raised above the fear of men, and enabled to speak with promptitude, facility, and propriety, far

beyond what was natural to them, or what they could have acquired by habit or study. That wonderful change, which, in these respects, took place in them, ought to be ascribed entirely to the agency of the promised Spirit, (John xiv. 26; xvi. 12, 13); and we may hence conclude, that religious knowledge, prudence, fortitude, utterance, and other endowments for the sacred ministry, or for any useful service in the church, are gifts of the Holy Spirit. Diligence indeed in the use of proper means, is required, yet the success of that diligence should be considered as the gift and work of the Spirit of Christ; on him we ought to depend for all needful qualifications for the services allotted us; and whilst we take to ourselves the blame of every mistake, defect, and evil, that mixes with our endeavours, the whole glory of all that is true, wise, or useful, should be ascribed to this divine Agent. This may surely be done, without enthusiasm or arrogance: and the apostle hath taught us to do it, in his before-cited discourse on spiritual gifts, in which he enumerates wisdom, knowledge, and the faculty of speaking to edification, exhortation, and comfort, among the operations of the Spirit; and these are evidently as much wanted at present, as they were in the primitive times, (1 Cor. xiv. 3). We need not then wonder, that the official ministration of numbers at present, is so devoid of pathos, energy, and *Scriptural* wisdom, when we learn, that all dependence on the Holy Spirit in preparing for the ministry or the pulpit is disclaimed by them as enthusiasm and folly: for if no man can say that “Jesus is the Lord,” or do anything effectual to promote the gospel, but by “the Holy Ghost;” and if men, pretending to be teachers, affront this Divine Agent, by rejecting and vilifying his proffered assistance, the consequence must be, that they will be left to oppose or disgrace the faith, instead of preaching it.

But these gifts too may be possessed and exercised by those that are strangers to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Men may be enabled by the Spirit to attain knowledge in the mysteries of the gospel, and readiness in speaking or writing about them, whilst they remain ungodly: even as others have possessed miraculous or prophetic gifts, whilst they continued the slaves of avarice or lust. Thus persons may arise, endued with eminent talents, whose preaching may excite great attention, and even do much good; or whose writings illuminate the church, and exceedingly tend to elucidate the truth, and to silence the objections of its enemies; and yet these very men may possibly be themselves *castaways*, because they “received not the love of the truth, neither obeyed it, but obeyed unrighteousness.” But these are *spiritual* gifts, which are wanted alike at all times; unless it can be believed that men are now so wise and good, and that Christianity is so congenial to our nature, and so generally understood and practiced; that we are fully competent, without any divine assistance, to maintain the cause of it in the world.

It has also been generally allowed by orthodox divines, that there are other influences of the Spirit on the mind, which do not always issue in its sanctification. "To resist the Holy Ghost," seems to mean something more than merely to reject the word of inspiration: and to "quench the Spirit," is not exclusively the sin of believers, when on some occasions they stifle his holy suggestions. He strives with, and powerfully stirs up the minds of many, who are not born again: new principles are not implanted, but natural powers are excited; conscience is influenced in part to perform its office, notwithstanding the opposition of the carnal heart; convincing views are given of many important truths; the Spirit concurs with an address to a man's fear, and even a Felix trembles before a prisoner in chains. A man's hopes are addressed, and "he hears gladly, and does many things," though he will not divorce Herodias: or convincing arguments are applied with energy to an intelligent worldling, and he is almost persuaded to be a Christian. Such characters often take up a profession of the gospel, and continue for a time, or even persist to the end, in an unfruitful form of godliness: and men of this description, when the Spirit has finally ceased to strive with them, have been the principal heresiarchs in every age, while the bulk of heretical societies have been constituted of inferior persons of the same stamp. Yet, as far as truth produces its proper effect, though it be at length borne down by human depravity and temptation, it ought to be ascribed to the Spirit; and in this sense, as well as in respect of miraculous powers, men have been partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have yet fallen away beyond the possibility of being renewed unto repentance, (Heb. vi. 4-6; x. 29). But, on the other hand, these strivings are often preparatory to those "things which accompany salvation;" nor can *we* always exactly distinguish between them, except by the effect: for they resemble two small seeds, which are so much alike, though of distinct species, that our eyes cannot distinguish between them; till, having been sown, they spring up and produce their respective plants, and then they are easily and perfectly known from each other.

The observations that have been made on regeneration, (Essay XII.) introduces what is needful to be added in this place, in respect to the special work and influences of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers. We may therefore observe, that the conversion of three thousand persons on the day of Pentecost, the rapid spread of the gospel which followed, and the holiness and joy of the primitive Christians, were as much the effect of that "out-pouring of the Spirit," as the miraculous gifts conferred on the apostles; and the same change wrought in men's characters and conduct by the gospel, must uniformly be ascribed to the same cause.

But we shall be able to mark more precisely the nature of these sanctifying influences of the Spirit, by adverting to the language of Scripture on

that subject. The word “Comforter,” by which our Lord distinguishes this divine Agent, may also signify an advocate, or an admonisher; and this title implies, that it is his office to plead the cause of God in our hearts, to excite and animate us to all holy duties, and to communicate to us all holy consolations. Water, which purifies, refreshes, and fructifies all nature; and fire, which illuminates, penetrates, melts, softens, and consumes whatever cannot be, as it were, changed into its own nature, are the constant emblems of that Spirit with which Christ baptises his true disciples. When he comes, “*he reproveth,*” or “*convinceth* men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment;” by his divine light he so discovers to them their obligations to God, and the demands of his perfect law, that they are deeply convinced of guilt, even in such things as before did not burden their consciences; especially, they soon perceive their state of condemnation as unbelievers, and the atrocious evil of not receiving Christ by faith: they are thus convinced of the justice of God in his dealings with sinners, and understand his righteousness in justifying believers; and so are brought to realize habitually a judgment to come, as the whole tenor of revelation manifests to them, that the prince of this world, and all his subjects, lie under certain condemnation. When the Holy Spirit has thus prepared the hearts of sinners, (as he did those of the Jews on the day of Pentecost, Acts ii. 37), “*he glorifies Christ, and receives of the things of Christ, and shows unto them,*” (John xvi. 7-15). By his illuminating energy, by divesting the mind of proud and carnal prejudices, and by bringing the words of Scripture to their remembrance, he discovers to them the glory and excellence of Emmanuel’s person, his infinite compassion and condescension, the perfection of his righteousness, the preciousness of his blood, the prevalence of his intercession, and the suitableness of his whole salvation. In proportion therefore as the sinner is abased and humbled in his own eyes, Christ becomes precious in his estimation; the Comforter exalts him in his heart; he perceives him to be “*altogether lovely,*” “*the pearl of great price,*” and that all things are but loss in comparison of him. Now he begins to see something of his unsearchable riches, his unfathomable love, his inexhaustible fulness; he finds that all he can want is comprised in a relation to, and interest in Christ, and in union and communion with him. His liberty, honour, pleasure, and felicity consist in having such a Saviour, brother, and friend; and those strains of admiring love, desire, gratitude, and praise, which once appeared to him too rapturous, or even enthusiastic, become the genuine language of his most lively hours, and he knows that they are all far beneath his real excellency and glory: thus the love of Christ to him, and his reciprocal love to Christ, constrain him to live to his glory. And here we may observe, that in proportion as the doctrine of the Spirit is exploded or overlooked, the person and work of Christ are generally dishonoured; and

whilst men plume themselves on a rational religion, they evidence, and sometimes must be conscious, that the language of Scripture does not suit their views, but far better accords to those of the enthusiasts, whom they so liberally vilify, and cordially despise. Is it not then evident, that the reason why Christ is no more glorified in the visible church, is simply this: men do not expect, depend on, or seek for the influences of the Holy Spirit *in this respect*; and therefore they are left to exalt themselves, or philosophy, or some favourite author, and to degrade the light of the world and the life of men?

Several of the apostle's prayers for his converts had respect, not to miraculous gifts, but to such things as are equally needful in every age. He desired, "that the Spirit of wisdom and revelation might enlighten their understandings to know God and the glory of his gospel, and cause them to experience the power of his grace," &c. (Eph. i. 17-19; iii. 16-21; 1 Cor. ii. 12; 2 Cor. iv. 3-6). Now, is it not necessary that all Christians should thus know God, understand the gospel and its privileges, and be inwardly strengthened in love and obedience to the Lord Jesus? Surely these are essentials to real Christianity in every age? And the state of the professing church of Christ, amidst all modern improvements, shows that they can no more be produced without the influences of the Spirit, than skill in agriculture can insure a crop of corn, without the influences of the sun and rain. The apostle says, "that the love of God is shed abroad by the Holy Ghost, who is given unto us;" and whether we understand this of our knowledge of God's love to us, or of our exercise of love to him, it is manifest that we cannot attain to it, except by the influences of the Spirit, preparing and pervading all the faculties of our souls, (Rom. v. 5); and indeed all fervent affections towards God, or joy in him, are deemed enthusiasm by those who deny these doctrines; and a decent conduct, with a form of godliness, constitutes the sum total of *improved Christianity*. The same apostle prays, that the Romans "may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost," (Rom. xv. 17). Hope is one of those graces which abides in the church, (1 Cor. xiii. 13); and if this springs from, and abounds through the power of the Spirit, we must conclude, that all who are destitute of his influences are either "without hope," or buoyed up in presumptuous confidence. According to St. Peter, the believer's obedience results from "the sanctification of the Spirit." And he says, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren," &c. (1 Pet. i. 2, 22). Surely these are duties of Christianity peculiar to no age or place; and the influences of the Spirit must be as needful to the performance of them at present, as when inspired apostles were the teachers of the church. "The kingdom of God is—in righteousness, peace, and *joy in the Holy Ghost*." (Rom. xiv. 17):

how then can we rejoice in the Lord always, without his blessed influences? But this subject is most copiously discussed in the eighth of Romans, which brevity forbids me to enlarge upon. Let it suffice in general to observe, that the apostle ascribes the believer's deliverance from "the law of sin and death," to "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," (2 Cor. iii. 17, 18); and derives the *spiritual mind*, which "is life and peace," from the same source. They in whom "the Spirit of God dwells," are "not in the flesh, but in the Spirit;" but "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his:" they, who "*through the Spirit* mortify the deeds of the body, shall live;" they "that are led," or willingly guided and influenced by him, "are the children of God." He dwells in them, not as a "spirit of bondage," to induce them to obey God from servile motives, but as a Spirit of adoption, by whom they cry, "Abba, Father:" and thus, by producing filial dispositions and affections in their hearts, he witnesses with them, that they are the children and heirs of God. They have therefore, the first-fruits of the Spirit," called elsewhere, the "seal of the Spirit," being the renewal of the Divine image on their souls, and the "earnest of the Spirit," or the beginning and sure pledge of heavenly felicity, (2 Cor. i. 22; Eph. i. 13, 14; iv. 30). But who can deny that these things are essential to genuine Christianity at all times, and in all places? In short, we are directed to pray "in," or by "the Holy Ghost," who "also helpeth our infirmities;" and whatever words we use, his influences alone can render our worship spiritual. Our holy tempers, affections, and actions are called "the fruits of the Spirit," (Gal. v. 22, 23; Eph. v. 9), to distinguish them from mere moral conduct, on worldly or legal principles. We are said "to live, and to walk in, and to be filled with the Spirit;" and all our heavenly wisdom, knowledge, strength, holiness, joy; all things relative to our repentance, faith, hope, love, worship, obedience, meetness for heaven, and foretastes of it, are constantly ascribed to his influences; nor can we escape fatal delusions, resist temptations, overcome the world, or glorify God, except as we are taught, sanctified, strengthened, and comforted by the Holy Spirit, who dwells in believers, "as a well of water springing up unto everlasting life."

We need not then wonder at the low ebb to which vital Christianity is fallen, when we consider how many nominal Christians utterly disclaim all dependence on the Spirit as enthusiasm; and how much this part of the gospel is overlooked by numbers who are zealous for other doctrines of it! The subject therefore suggests to us the vast importance of owning the divine person and whole work of the Spirit in all our services; of praying *for*; that we may pray *by* the Spirit, (Luke xi. 13); of applying for and depending on him in all things; of cautiously distinguishing his genuine influences from every counterfeit, by Scriptural rules; of avoiding those

worldly cares, and that indolence, which “quench,” and all those evil tempers, which “grieve the Spirit of God;” and of giving the glory of all the good wrought in or by us, to him, as the original source and author of it. Thus, depending on the mercy of the Father, the atonement of the Son, and the grace of the Spirit, we shall be prepared to give glory to the Triune God our Saviour, both now and for evermore.