

THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST

by Charles Fowler

Fowler's exploration of the spirit and character of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Gospels, examining His attitudes, dispositions, and manner of relating to people as a model for the believer.

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The Spirit of Christ

The Spirit of Christ Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.—Romans 8:9.

I read that with the conviction that it is one of the most searching passages that can be found in the Book of God. It takes hold of the question of our salvation as a very substantial and thorough question. It removes indefinitely, almost infinitely, from this problem of our destiny, all shadow of uncertainty or of doubt. It brings us squarely to the facts in our character. On the force of this Scripture we are borne up on to a platform where we stand with our hearts uncovered and naked before the eye of God. This means that the saint must be great in the arduous greatness of things achieved; that there is no chance for sainthood by any fixt, imputed plan, but that our real selves shall test and make our real future.

I never read this Scripture in the presence of a Christian congregation without feeling that I have in some way chopped down through every heart with a great broadaxe. There is no whitewashing this passage: "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Not, "He will do tolerably well, but not quite as well as he might do"; not that he will get on after a fashion, and have quite a respectable entrance into the city of the great King, though he may not push quite as far toward the front as he might have done if he had had the Spirit of the Lord Jesus. Not that at all; but, If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, there is not the remotest shadow of a chance for him: "he is none of his." And so I put this at you, asking you, on account of the great fact that you are going hence, to so apply this critical test to your hearts and lives that you may see and feel your need, and that you may take hold on the great supply, and have that actual transformation of character that will justify you in believing that you have the Spirit of Christ. The success of the missionary cause turns upon exactly the spirit of this text. I have no faith in the final triumph of the missionary cause based upon any other ground than that of the honest, deep-down conviction of the people of God that the Lord God of Heaven wants this work done. I am here as a believer in a supernatural gospel—not with philosophy that may be framed out of the human life of Jesus, but with a religion that is based upon the supernatural life of the divine Christ. And I appeal to you on this subject of missions as to a company of men who believe in the divine authority of the Book of God; who believe in a blood atonement; who believe in salvation by faith only; who believe in the pardon of sin and in the regeneration of your natures; who believe in the power of the Holy Ghost; who believe, in short, in the sum and substance of an old-fashioned orthodoxy. And I put this cause upon you as such believers, knowing that, if such is your position, you have at least the large part of the argument wrought into the very fiber of your being, by which you cannot stop short of the conviction that what you have need of for your salvation other people will need for their salvation. You know that you need a divine Redeemer; you know that you need the divine pardoning of your sins; you know that you need the supernatural and divine cleansing of your hearts; you know that you need the divine, unbreakable promises; you know that you need this Word, and the way to salvation set forth in this Book of God, by which you know that there is none other name given under heaven among men, whereby we must be saved. And so I come to you as to those who have had some experience in supernatural matters, with the cause based upon this Book of God,

asking that your experience may be made possible for the multitudes beyond, who have not yet had this opportunity.

Let us take some of the simpler and plainer things in this question, that we may come up to it without any hesitation. Now, I do not need to go into the question as to what God will do with the heathen. I don't know what He will do with them. I know as much about it as you do, or anybody else, because I know what the Book says about it. God knows better about this than I do, and will find a way that I cannot dream of. But, because the words are not uttered by divine authority, I dare not stand here and utter any word of hope for any man beyond the gospel committed to me to preach. This I know: That if the heathen have the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, whether they ever saw the Lord Jesus or not, they are of His. And this I know: That if this congregation have not the spirit of the Lord Jesus, though it may have seen Him, they are not of His. And this I know: That He will save a Jew and a Gentile on the same terms; that He will do no better for the Gentile than He will for the Jew, and no better for the Jew than for the Gentile. And if there was no other name given under heaven among men by which an ancient Jew or an ancient Gentile might be saved, that is true today. The Lord Jesus thought that these people needed the gospel, and that they needed it so much that He actually came and submitted Himself unto death that they might have the gospel. And God seems so thoroughly to believe that they need the gospel that He actually gives His only-begotten Son to die, that they may have the gospel. He treats the case just exactly as if He thought, at least, that they do really need this divine Redeemer. He has done, in every step and process of this great work of world-saving, just exactly as He would have done had He absolutely thought and believed that they needed a divine Redeemer. And then I understand another thing out of the Book: That the very last and supreme utterance of the Master on earth grew out of His conviction that we should do exactly this thing. And see how He comes up to it, little by little! He does not rush suddenly upon it—He does not, upon any truth. It is not in the divine plan to flash upon us in anything. Truths grow; moral ideas grow. They come into the race little, and hardly able to stand at all; we can barely find them beneath us in the lower strata of our being. But they struggle into power and strength until they fill the field of vision. Nearly every great truth of Old and New Testament Scripture is to be found in the Book of Genesis. In Genesis you will find the principle of the atonement; you will find the division of animals into clean and unclean, foreshadowing sacrifice; you will find the principle of the acceptance of offerings that came out of the flock, and the rejection of the offerings out of the field; you will find the pardon of sin and the giving of covenants—all the essential parts of the New Testament growing with their roots away back in Genesis. There is the first declaration of the coming of this wondrous Redeemer. It was so dim and uncertain that it was hard to tell what it meant; somehow, somewhere, some time, “the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head.” It was so dim that our first great mother, when she had gotten her first son, cried out in her joy, “I have gotten a man from the Lord!” She thought she had the Redeemer, but she had only a murderer. It was many a century before the Redeemer would come. The truth was unfolded little by little; a little brighter it shone on the altars of the patriarchs; it was unfolded a little more in the visions of the prophets; was exemplified in the ceremonials of the temple; and in the fullness of time it came with the Master and His disciples and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. And then see, when the Master comes, how He takes hold of us, knowing that we are but little, and that we have to be lifted up and enlarged before we can take in these great truths! He says: “I have more to tell you: you cannot bear it today; I will tell you tomorrow.” And so He gives lesson and instruction, and parable and illustration, all through His life,

teaching these disciples, chosen on account of their particular adaptation for the reception of His truth; walking with them day by day, trying to lift their thought toward the spiritual and the eternal; teaching them that it is not His plan to put them on His right hand and His left, and trying to lift them up toward a spiritual and eternal kingdom. So He keeps on all the time, lifting them out of their littleness, saying to them later: "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and in Samaria, and in the uttermost parts of the earth." They did not know what to make of that. He was lifting them out of their narrowness. And so He pushes on still further with them, lifting them up, until, in the supreme hour of His earthly history—after His agony, after the cross, after He had broken asunder the bars of the sepulcher, after He had risen, and been declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead—He hovers over the Church, coming down to speak to them by the seaside and mountain-side; appearing to them suddenly, vanishing as quickly; offering His hands to their touch, showing His body to their vision, yet all the time lifting them up, until He brought them to the thought and gave to the Church the idea of His ubiquity, saying: "Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world"; and they appreciated the feeling that He was within hand-reach, and that this was a spiritual kingdom, and that they could take hold upon the great spiritual forces. And thus He lifted them up and prepared them for His great truth, until at last, in the supreme moment of His earthly history, we see Him yonder on the summit of the mount—the earth beneath Him, the angels gathered above Him—with His hands spread out over His followers, with the summit of Olivet receding beneath His feet. He cries out to them: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." And the unspeakable glory took Him out of their sight. That is the supreme utterance of the Master after many a century of preparation, opening our hearts, bringing us to this great truth, and that this one thing He wants done is His final charge to believers: Go everywhere; teach, preach, baptize, agonize, give, sacrifice—out to the very ends of the earth. And lo! I am with you alway, and you shall lack no good thing. Surely, there can be no doubt that the Master, at least, thinks that these people have a great need for this gospel.

There are some who have an idea that salvation is to be the sum and substance of what we are. Well, I think that way myself: that, if you find heaven on the other side of death, you will take it over with you; if there is any condition of peace, you will take that condition of peace with you. Death will be no more than going over a seam in this carpet. The moment after death will differ from the moment before death in your essential character no more than any two consecutive moments in your life. If you are a mean, narrow, selfish, ugly, cross man the moment before death, you will be a mean, narrow, selfish, ugly, cross man the moment after death. If you find a good character over yonder, you will take it over with you. If you have a good character to take over with you, you will have it in the Lord Jesus Christ here. If you live on that basis, I think this is pretty safe that those millions out yonder in the darkness, plunged in ignorance and superstition, knowing nothing about morality and nothing about heaven—those millions want a chance, that the same law that governs our lives will govern theirs. I surround my boy with the best possible opportunities; I watch every book that comes in his hands; I watch every playmate that I possibly can that comes in his path; I see to it, as my highest business on this footstool—higher than my call to this pulpit—that that boy has a fair chance for heaven. If I push him out into the alley to herd with criminals, and be dandled in the lap of vice, and be familiar with all corruption, I have no moral right to expect to meet him in

heaven. But if I multiply advantages about him, give him the best possible books and surroundings, make him at home with the Lord Jesus, so that he talks about his salvation and life eternal as he does about matters in the home, I have a good right to expect that the King will give me His eternal peace.

Now, I think that the law that holds over my boy holds over all boys in China and Japan and Hindustan; that, just in proportion as we multiply the light and the favorable circumstances about them, then in that proportion we increase their fair chance for heaven. I think it is sound in philosophy. I believe that, just in proportion as we act by it, we will be safe.

Now, they are plunged in darkness. They know nothing about our way of salvation, nothing about the pardon of sin, nothing about purity, nothing about righteousness, nothing about heaven. We want to multiply their chances to rid themselves of sin, and to take hold upon life, and make their way in the path of peace. And the Master seems to so think it that He says: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations." And if they will believe it, as I read, they will be saved. "But how can they believe if they have not heard? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach except they be sent?" So the Master says, Go, send quick, everywhere. That I take to be the teaching of the Book concerning their needs. But there is another side of it, and that is the side that swings in under the passage I have read this morning, and that is our side of it, our relation to the cause: "If any man have not the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, he is none of his."

Now, what is the spirit of Christ? I will tell you: He came not to be ministered unto. Please remember that. Not to see how much He could gather into His own bosom out of the lives of others. Not to be ministered unto; not to be petted, and dandled, and lifted along and fed all the way, with no burden and no care and no work—not that. He came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister; to pour out of His life into the lives of others; to see what He could do to make others blest; and "to give his life a ransom for many." Not merely to give the little pittance that He could spare and not know it any more than one would miss the farthing with which he would buy his ride on the street car, but to give His life a ransom for many. And if any man have not that spirit, he is none of His.

Now I preach you a doctrine of salvation by faith only, and I put the emphasis on the word only. That is exactly what I need as a sinner: I want some sort of release from my past transgressions that will give me a new start. I have gotten behind; I am borrowing money to pay interest with, and I see no way out. I must have a spiritual bankruptcy law. Somebody must come in to my relief, or I am everlastingly undone. And so I preach this blest doctrine of the Book of God: "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves: it (the salvation) is the gift of God." I take salvation as a divine gift, and take it with a glad heart. It gives me a new chance; it unhinges my present struggle for heaven from the past transgressions of my life, and gives me an open door to heaven that I could not reach on any other platform. And so I preach this doctrine to sinners, knowing that it is exactly what they need.

There is another part of it that covers the question of our pardon; that takes all my past sins and wipes them out; that gives me a new chance for righteousness. Now mind: That pardon, that new life, that new chance works out all the time necessarily from my finger-ends; it shows itself in my life, absolutely, as certainly as it is there; and if I cannot find the fruit of it in the fruits of the Spirit, in the interest in God's cause, in patience and teachableness, in gentleness and love, I have the

absolute demonstration that I have not the thing itself. Saved by faith, kept alive, kept saved by work, in work, by grace in work. Let me touch that theology just a little. If you are pardoned, you are pardoned by the Lord in a second, through faith—when you believe, that is. Pardon is an operation in God’s mind concerning myself; you cannot pardon yourself. God pardons. If we are pardoned He can do it in a second, when we believe. The next step in the case is, that there is not anything in the Book of God that gives us any ground to believe that in that same faith, or believing, or pardon, we will be instantly lifted up into the stature of a man in Christ Jesus. What I mean to say is this: That there is not one word in this Book that will justify any man in believing that he may be brought by any process to the stature of a man in Christ Jesus in a minute. But some good brother will say: “Oh! now I am just a little afraid that you are striking against that blest old Methodist doctrine of sanctification.” No, I am not. I haven’t said anything about sanctification. But I will. If you are sanctified, or cleansed, that is God’s work, through faith, and He can do it in a second. Now, understand me definitely, you cannot cleanse yourself. God cleanses you through faith in the cleansing blood of His Son. It is His work. You cannot grow into it. You can grow in it, but if you don’t grow in it you may know you are not in it—you are in something else. But you can grow in it, because it is God’s work, and He will do it when you believe. But what of that? What are you after you are cleansed? I will tell you. You are a clean baby: that is all. You are not a man in Christ Jesus; you are only a babe—cleansed, indeed, and greatly improved by the process, too, but you are not matured. Do not miss, now, the broad distinction between purity and maturity. You are purified, through faith, in a second; you are matured through many a struggle and many a year. God cannot make a twenty-one-year-old saint in one second less than twenty-one years. There is no platform marked over with faith upon which a man may step and be lifted up into the perfect stature of a man in Christ Jesus in a minute. It is not the teaching of the Book. But all the year, loving, and giving, and fighting, and praying, and walking in righteousness, you will mature characters, and by and by you will grow into the manhood in Christ Jesus that is set before us in the gospel. Now, if you come in here and tell me that there is a baby over yonder in the next square, that is three weeks old, and can talk Greek and Latin, and Spanish and Italian, and solve all the problems in mathematics, I will tell you that that is a monstrosity, and you don’t want that kind of babies in your house: they will turn you out in a few days. So, if you come in here and tell me that you have, down in your prayer-meeting, a spiritual baby three or four weeks old, that can teach all the old saints, and can tell them all about God, and heaven, and faith, and theology, and all about everything in the Church, I will tell you that that is a monstrosity. And you don’t want that kind in your prayer-meeting; they will turn you out before a great while. St. Paul says: “Ye are born babes, and ye are fed on milk”; and the trouble with too many of us is that we keep on that diet when we ought to be eating meat. The Master says: “First the blade, then the ear; after that, the full corn in the ear.” So I am free to say that God’s plan of making saints is to give them the divine germ—if you please, the supernatural principle; or, as our scientists would say, with proper environments, “That have the divine initial impulse,” but as our fathers would have said, “They got through at the altar”; born of God, and then cleansed of God in the true process of education and faith, they matured at the harvest. God gives us the start and the cleansing, and we have to do all the rest of it. He will give us opportunity for growth by loading and goading us, by setting on our track every sort of force to test us—to “polish us,” as the old Hebrew word means. When Abraham was tested he was “polished.” He will put us on such lines that, if we stand true to our convictions and walk according to the light we have, He will bring us on to manhood.

See how wonderfully the Word of God fits down upon this? Take that remarkable passage that, to me, is as beautiful as anything can be, where He says: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor"—I know what that means in the struggle under sin—"all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give"—I will give: it is mine. You cannot earn it: you cannot buy it; you cannot find it; you cannot dig it out. It is mine—"I will give you rest"—the blest pardon that only God can give. Then, in the very next second and breath, He says: "Take my yoke upon you"—that means work—"and learn of me"—that is more work—and, "For I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find"—that is yours; I do not give that to you; that is not mine to give; that is yours. "Ye shall find rest to your souls." That is the rest that comes from the crystallization of the character in righteousness; that comes from the habit of believing, and the habit of obeying, and the habit of praying; from the habit of righteousness, until the old saint is ready for any struggle, and never expects to be turned aside. That, I take it, is God's plan of building up saints, and for fitting them for the rest that is in God, that abides.

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