

(Power From on High) 24. the Holy Spirit in the First Epistle of John

by A.B. Simpson

The Holy Ghost is the divine anointing that teaches and keeps us abiding in Christ, and witnesses to our deeper union with Him, our service, and gives us the seal of power and usefulness.

Scripture: 1 John 2:20

Topics: "The Holy Spirit", "Witnessing for Christ"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the profound relationship between the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ in the First Epistle of John, noting that John's focus on Christ reflects his deep saturation with the Holy Spirit. He explains that the Holy Spirit's role is to glorify Jesus, and as believers are filled with the Spirit, they become more occupied with Christ rather than their own experiences. Simpson discusses the Holy Spirit as the divine anointing, the indwelling presence, and the witness to our faith, urging believers to recognize the Spirit's power and to be vigilant against counterfeit spirits. Ultimately, he encourages Christians to yield to the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to work through them to bear witness to Jesus.

Transcript

One is impressed with the limited number of direct references to the Holy Ghost in the great epistle of the beloved disciple in comparison with his references to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are only four or five passages in all this long letter, in which the blessed Paraclete is mentioned by name, but Christ is referred to over and over again. One is led to inquire why this should be. And perhaps the answer suggests a deep and beautiful truth. John was so saturated with the Holy Ghost that, like the Holy Ghost, who never witnesses of Himself, He was constantly thinking of Jesus, and witnessing of Him. The very fact that he was not directly referring to the Spirit was the best evidence that he was in the Spirit, and that he was occupied, as the Holy Ghost always is, in thinking of Jesus and glorifying the Son of God.

And so, beloved, as we are most full of the Holy Ghost we shall be most occupied with Jesus; so that we will not think so much of our own experience or of the glorious Friend within us as the face of Jesus and the depths of His heart of love.

There are, however, several very important references to the Holy Spirit in this epistle. Before we take them up in detail, it is necessary that we should explain our silence respecting one of the verses in this

epistle which bears most direct witness to the Holy Ghost.

It is the well known passage, 1 John 5: 7: "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one." This verse which contains so direct and theological a testimony to the doctrine of the Trinity is undoubtedly spurious. It is not found in any of the early manuscripts, and by the consent of the highest scholars of our age it has been omitted from the Revised Version, and was undoubtedly added by some transcriber, who had more zeal for theology than discernment of the mind of the Spirit and the order of thought in this chapter. The verse is quite irrelevant in the place where it is introduced, and it is by no means necessary to prove the divinity, either of the Son or of the Holy Ghost.

I. THE HOLY GHOST AS THE DIVINE ANOINTING.

"But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him." 1 John 2:20, 27.

We have previously referred to the symbol of oil, and the figure of anointing, with reference to the Holy Spirit. The idea of this passage is substantially the same as in the passages formerly referred to. The word is a little different. It is not so much the anointing as the unction, the 'chrism' which is here mentioned.

We need not remind our readers that this word 'unction' or 'anointing' is the same word from which the Christ comes, so that "anointed one" just means 'Christ one'. We read in the previous verses of the anti-Christ and of the many anti-Christes who shall come. In contrast with these are 'the Christ ones'. The Holy Ghost is raising up Christ men. The word Christian is derived from this root, but it is not entirely satisfactory. A Christian is one that is somehow connected with Christ, but a 'Christ one' is one that is united with Christ and represents Him, being, in fact, a second edition of Him, and representing the very life of Christ among men.

Now this was the great mission of the Holy Ghost -- to set apart the Christ, and make Him the great pattern for all future men. Having accomplished this work in the glorification of Jesus, He is now reproducing the Christ, in the 'Christ ones', and calling and training the disciples of Jesus to represent the Master and repeat His life through the Christian dispensation.

We have already called attention to the use of anointing in setting apart prophets, priests, and kings, and to the special significance of the name of Christ in relation to His threefold office as our Prophet, Priest, and King. In like manner we are anointed to be prophets, priests, and kings of the Church of God, to be God's witnesses to men of His will and work, to be God's intercessors for men, and to be God's kingly ones, victorious over self and sin, and waiting to share with our blessed Head the kingdom of the millennial age.

Now the Holy Ghost calls us to this high ministry and fits us for it. The anointing here spoken of is described as a divine gift, "Ye have an anointing." The verb here is quite emphatic. It means we have received a special gift, and we know we have received it. Beloved, have we received the divine anointing, the Holy Ghost?

His work is here referred to especially in two aspects; as a Teacher, and as a Keeper. As our Teacher He brings to us the mind of God through the Holy Scriptures. The language here used does not imply that we are inspired as the apostles and prophets of the Lord, to know the will of God apart from the Holy Scriptures. It does not mean that we are not to receive the message of God from human lips; but it does mean we are not to receive any message as the word of man, but, even when we are taught by the ministers of Christ, we are to receive them as the messengers of God, to compare their word with God's Holy Word, and only to receive it as it is the voice of God, speaking to our conscience in the Holy Ghost.

But this anointing not only teaches us, but keeps us abiding in Him. The great object of this blessed presence in our hearts is to unite us to Christ, and to keep us ever dependent upon Him and close to Him, so that "when He shall appear we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." So let us receive Him; so let us abide in Him; so let us represent our blessed Lord. And in the age of anti-Christ let us be not only Christians but Christ ones, standing for our Lord on earth as He ever stands for us in heaven.

II. THE INDWELLING SPIRIT.

"And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given to us." 1 John 3: 24.
"Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit." 1 John 4:13.

It is not so much, however, the indwelling of the Spirit that is here referred to, as the indwelling of Christ through the Spirit. The object of the Holy Ghost is to reveal and glorify Jesus and make Him personal and real in the life of the believer.

This is not a matter of faith, but it is a matter of knowledge. "We know that He abideth in us." It is real to our consciousness, it is satisfying to our hearts. Christ is to us a personal presence, claims our affection, and satisfies all our need, while the Holy Ghost just ministers Him to us, and holds us in abiding communion with Him as the source and substance of all our life for spirit, soul and body.

We shall never rightly understand the Holy Ghost so long as we terminate our thought upon Him. The Scriptures always lead us on beyond every subjective experience to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

III. COUNTERFEIT SPIRITS.

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they be of God, because that many false spirits have gone forth into the world." 1 John 4:1. The great ambition of the devil is to counterfeit the Holy Ghost. He has always had many counterfeits and many anti-Christ, but as the age draws to a close "the spirits of wickedness in heavenly places" will grow thicker and "the wiles of the devil" will become more subtle and deceiving.

Already we can discover the beginning of that age of Satanic delusion which is to close the present dispensation and gather the hosts of evil to "the great battle of the Lord God Almighty." Often he comes in the disguise of good and as an angel of light, and God has warned us to be watchful and to "be not deceived."

The Apostle John gives us the supreme test, and that is the witness these spirits bear to the Lord Jesus Christ. When any spiritual influence terminates upon itself and does not directly lead us forward to the Lord Jesus Christ and to glorify and vivify Him, we have good reason to be doubtful of it. Any spiritual

experience that rests chiefly in the experience and in its delightfulness or significance, is very apt to prove another spirit. The Holy Ghost always witnesseth to Christ.

This passage gives us a still more discriminating touchstone by which we may detect some of the spirits that have gone abroad in our own day. "Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God; but this is that Spirit of anti-Christ of which we have heard that it should come," and which even in John's day was in the world.

This is the spirit that denies the material world and the actual physical incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, making the story of creation a beautiful allegory and the account of Christ a fiction, discarding the doctrine of sin and atonement and the actual crucifixion of Christ as a substitute for sinful men.

It is not necessary to name the plausible and wide-spread error which is abroad today, which tells us that there is no material world, that there is no material body, that there is, therefore, no physical basis for disease, that everything is ideas and mind, and that all we have to do is to think rightly, and everything else will be right, for pain is only an idea in the mind and if we refuse to believe in the pain it will cease to exist, and healing will follow as a matter of course. This is neither Christianity nor science, but it is the false spirit which John predicted eighteen centuries ago, and one of the harbingers of the final anti-Christ.

But there are many more abroad. There is real danger among those who know the Holy Ghost, that they should become absorbed or lifted up in their own self-consciousness, and thus be separated from Christ and the truth. Satan is trying to get us on a pinnacle of the temple that He may cast us down into some wild fanaticism or presumption. If we are God's true children he cannot kill us, but he can break our backs and disable us for the battle of the Lord. He can mar our testimony, cause our good to be evil spoken of, and make us so extravagant and ridiculous that we shall not commend our testimony to thoughtful and well-balanced men. May God give to us "the spirit of a sound mind," as well as of "love and power."

IV. THE SPIRIT OF VICTORY.

"Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." 1 John 4:4.

The secret of victory is to recognize the Conqueror within and the adversary as a conquered foe. John does not say we shall overcome, but he says we have overcome them, because He that is in us is "greater than he that is in the world." "He that is in us" has already conquered, and He leads us on to His own victory. We are to meet the enemy as already subdued and, like Joshua and the hosts of Israel, to put our feet upon the necks of the giants and look into their faces with defiance. Satan has power only when he can make us dread him. He flees before the victorious faith and holy confidence.

At the same time, John fully recognizes the power of him that is in the world. "We are of God," he says later, "and the world lieth in the wicked one." It lies in his arms, a helpless captive, taken alive at his will. He is the power that controls it, and, although it may look sometimes like a very cultivated, beautiful and civilized world, yet the principle that lies at the root of all its progress and power is human selfishness and, therefore, godlessness. Christ is not yet the sovereign of all the world. He is the sovereign of His people's hearts; He is in them; Satan is in the world. But the heart in which He dwells is already victor, and goes forth to every conflict with the battle cry, "Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

V. THE WITNESSING SPIRIT.

This is the last aspect under which the Holy Ghost is presented in the Epistle of John. "It is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree in one," 1 John 5: 6, 8. The three witnesses who agree upon earth are the Holy Ghost, the water of baptism, and the blood of Jesus Christ which we commemorate in the Holy Supper, and which we recognize as the atonement for our sins, and the purchase of our redemption. It is of the witness of the Spirit that we are called, however, to speak here.

1. The Holy Ghost witnesses first through the Word, and this is John's argument in this passage. He says, "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which He hath testified of His Son; for God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." Then he goes on to say that if we receive not this witness "we make Him a liar, because we believe not the witness which God hath given of His Son." This is the message of the Gospel. It is the Holy Ghost that speaketh. It comes to men as God's witness and He declares to the sinner that God hath given to us eternal life, that this life is in His Son, and that if we accept His Son, we have life. Now our duty is to believe this witness, and to believe it implicitly and immediately; the moment we do believe it, it becomes true for us, and we are included in the objects of this great salvation. This is where faith must commence, by taking God's witness and believing His Word respecting our own salvation through Jesus Christ.

2. The Holy Ghost next witnesses in our hearts that that which we have believed is true for us and real to us. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in Himself." The moment we believe the Word, that Word becomes effectual in our hearts and brings us into the actual experience of peace and salvation. The Word comes first and then the inward witness. We cannot receive the Holy Ghost's assurance of our acceptance of salvation, until we believe on the simple Word of God that we are accepted and saved, simply because we have come to Christ as He commanded us, and we are not cast out as He promised. Then the soul enters into a real and conscious peace and a delightful assurance, based upon God's Word and repeated by God's Spirit to the individual conscience, that we are the children of God.

3. The Holy Ghost witnesses to our deeper union with Christ and our divine Sonship. When the disciple fully yields himself to God, he is sealed with the Holy Ghost; the Spirit of Sonship is shed abroad in the heart, and Jesus Christ is made personal and real to the soul. The Spirit of God testifies to our union with Him. And so Christ has said, "At that day"; namely, when the Spirit of God comes, "ye shall know that I am in the Father, He in me, and I in you." This is the sealing of the Spirit. This is the wedding ring forever authenticating the marriage of the soul to its Beloved.

4. The Holy Ghost witnesses to God's acceptance of our prayers. This follows in 1 John 5: 14, 15, "And this is the confidence we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us. And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him."

5. The Holy Ghost witnesses to our service, and gives us the seal of power and usefulness. "God also bearing witness unto them with signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will," Hebrews 2: 4. We go forth to the service of Christ and the Holy Ghost bears witness to our service. He gives us power for service; He gives us souls for our seals; He makes our words effectual, and He makes our fruit "remain" for His glory and our own eternal joy.

Every servant of Christ who is baptized with the Holy Ghost has a right to expect the witness of the Spirit to his work. Just as of old, "they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and

confirming the Word with signs following," so still we have a right to expect "the signs following." Sometimes they are spiritual signs, in the conversion of souls; sometimes they are physical signs, in the healing of the body; sometimes they are circumstances of marvelous import, in answered prayer, difficulties removed, signal providences of God, and the manifesting of God's approval and blessing. So God has set His seal upon the missionary work of our day. So God has set His seal upon the testimony of those who have dared to claim the fullness of the gospel, and enter into all the riches of their inheritance. So God will set His seal upon every life that is fully consecrated and fully yielded to Him.

Beloved, claim the witness, expect the power; do not be satisfied without His seal to your testimony.

6. The Holy Ghost not only witnesses to us, but witnesses through us. The special object of His coming upon us is that we shall be witnesses unto Jesus. "Ye shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth."

This is the great ministry of the Spirit, to witness through the disciples of Christ to the Church, to the world, and especially to the heathen.

Beloved, have we, as we read these words, the consciousness that we have been true to our testimony? Have we stood for Christ in our home? Have we spoken to all in our household fearlessly and fully the witness of Christ Jesus? Can we say that we are "pure from the blood of all men?" Are we known in our business and social circles as uncompromising friends of Christ? Have we dared to speak in the Church of Christ in every proper and becoming way the message and the witness of the Master? Is our position known? Are we out and out for Christ, and is it our joy and privilege, as opportunity is afforded, to bear witness to the unsaved, of Him who is able to save to the uttermost? And shall we some day find waiting for us a chorus of loving hearts that shall be our eternal crown and seal?

A few weeks ago, the writer had the great joy of standing in a pulpit before a large congregation, and hearing the pastor of that great Church rise and tell his people that more than twenty years before, he had been led to Christ by the one who now stood by his side, although this fact had never yet been known to this one, whom he introduced to his people as, under God, the instrument of his salvation and usefulness. As our heart thrilled with humble gratitude to God for such a privilege, we seemed to see the vision of a time when, in yonder heavenly world, one and another might come forward and greet us and lead us to the throne and tell the blessed Master that He had used us to bring them to God, and we for the first time should meet and know the children from many lands that the Holy Ghost had made seals of our ministry. O beloved, will anyone there be waiting and watching for thee? Have you some surprises in store at God's right hand when you shall "rest from your labors and your works shall follow you?"

Let us receive the fullness of the Spirit first, and then we cannot but give Him. Let Him witness in you and to you, and then He will surely witness through you. Oh, let us be so fully given to Him, that He can possess us and control us, and then can use us to reproduce in others blessing which we have received!

In a frontier Indian mission station, a little girl, one day, came to her teacher and said, "Teacher, will you let me do something?" The teacher asked her what she wanted to do. She said, "I want to give myself away to you, because I love you," and kneeling down by her side and putting her two hands in the teacher's, she said, "I give myself to you, because I love you." And the little heart just swelled with gladness, as she threw herself into the arms of her teacher, so glad to be owned and loved.

A few days afterwards she asked the teacher how she could consecrate herself to Christ. She had heard about it, but didn't understand it. The teacher said, "Darling, just give yourself away to Jesus as you gave yourself away to me."

A light came into the little face, and kneeling down again beside her teacher, she clasped her hands, and looking up with holy reverence, said, "Jesus I give myself to You, because I love You;" and then the Holy Ghost came down and she knew she was sealed His own forever.

She had a very wicked father in a distant station, a cruel, brutal man who refused to listen to the gospel. She began to pray for him, and one day she asked the teacher if anything could be done to save him. "Why," said her teacher, "write to him and tell him that you have given yourself away to Jesus, and ask him to do the same." The little letter was sent with many tears and prayers. Days and weeks passed by, but nothing seemed to come out of it. She did not know but he was fiercely angry and waiting for some terrible revenge. But one day he appeared at the mission. He had walked fifty miles, and was tired and broken, and tears were running down his face. He asked for the teacher, and then he requested to be baptized. He said he had come "to give himself away to Jesus," and amid the rejoicings of his little one, and all at the station, the rough, brutal, wicked man gave himself to Jesus and became a humble follower and fearless witness of the Savior he had hated and despised.

Beloved, shall we let Him have us, and then shall we let Him use us likewise?

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