

THE HOLY SPIRIT Chapter 31 The Spirit Endowing

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Transcript

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Chapter 31

The Spirit Endowing

From the graces which the Spirit works in God's children, we turn now to consider the gifts which He bestows upon God's servants. This brings us to a comprehensive subject, and instead of devoting two brief papers thereto, a series of lengthy articles might well be written thereon. We can but here single out one or two aspects of it—those which we consider most need our attention today. Broadly speaking the fundamental principle underlying this branch of our theme may be expressed thus: when God calls any to the performance of special work in His service, He equips them by the gifts of His Spirit. For example we read, "The LORD hath called by name Bezaleel . . . and He hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship; and to devise curious works, to work in gold" etc. (Ex. 35:30-32). Now just as men erred grievously concerning the being of God, grossly misrepresenting Him by images; and just as there have been the most horrible errors respecting the Person of the Mediator; so there has been fearful confusion upon the gifts of the Spirit, in fact it is at this point there pertains the most serious mistakes with regards to Him. Men have failed to distinguish between His extraordinary and His ordinary gifts, and have sought to generalize what was special and exceptional. Urging the rank and file of professing Christians to seek "power from on High," the "baptism of the Spirit," or His "filling for service," the wildest extravagances have been fostered and the door has been opened wide for Satan to enter and delude the souls and wreck the bodily health of thousands of people.

Gift of Prophecy It was well said by John Owen nearly three centuries ago that, "The great deceit and abuse that hath been in all ages of the church under the pretense of the name and work of the Holy Spirit, make the thorough consideration of what we are taught concerning them exceedingly necessary." The most signal gift of the Spirit for the benefit of His people in Old Testament times was that of prophecy. The Prophets were men who spoke in the name and by the authority of God, giving forth a Divinely inspired message from Him. It is not surprising, then, that many pretended unto this gift who were never inspired by the Holy Spirit, but rather were filled by a lying spirit, Satan making use of them to accomplish his own designs: see 1 Kings 22:6, 7; Jeremiah 5:3 1, etc. Those facts are recorded for our warning! This same gift of prophecy occupied a prominent place in the early days of the Christian dispensation, before the New Testament was written. The Gospel was at first declared from the immediate revelation of the Spirit,

preached by His direct assistance, made effectual by His power, and accompanied in many instances by outward miraculous works, the whole of which is designated "the ministration of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:8). Those extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit were then so obvious and so acknowledged by all Christians that those who wished to impose and deceive found no more successful method than by claiming to be themselves immediately inspired by the Spirit. Consequently we find such warnings given by God as, "Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:20, 21); "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you" (2 Pet. 2:1); "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God"(1 John 4:1). Gift of Discernment In order to preserve the church in truth and peace during those primitive times, and safeguard them from being imposed upon by the false prophets while there was a real communication of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit (whereby the more occasion was afforded for charlatans to pretend unto the possession of them), God graciously endowed some of His people with the gift of "the discerning of spirits" (1 Cor. 12:10). The saints were thereby provided with some who were enabled in extraordinary manner to judge and determine those who claimed to be specially endowed by the Spirit—but when the extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit ceased, this particular gift was also withdrawn, so the Christians are now left with the Word alone by which to measure and try all who claim to be the mouthpiece of God. Signs and Wonders "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit" (Heb. 2:3, 4). This passage makes known to us God's design in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit at the beginning of this dispensation. They were for the purpose of confirming the preached Word—for none of the New Testament had then been written! They were for the establishing of the Gospel; not to beget and strengthen faith, but to cause unbelievers to listen to the Truth—compare 1 Corinthians 14:22, 24, 25. Nine Gifts In 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 we are supplied with a list of those extraordinary gifts of the Spirit which then obtained—we use the word "extraordinary" in contrast from His ordinary gifts, or those which obtain in all ages and generations. "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues" (1 Cor. 12:8-10). It will be noted that just as "the fruit of the Spirit" is divided into nine graces (Gal. 5:22, 23), so "the ministration of the Spirit" is here described under nine distinct gifts. A very few words must now suffice upon them. "The word of wisdom" (1 Cor. 12:8) was a special gift bestowed upon the Apostles (hence it heads this list of gifts) for the defense of the Gospel against powerful adversaries: see Luke 21:15! "The word of knowledge" was a special gift bestowed on all then called of God to preach the Gospel: it supernaturally qualified them to expound Divine mysteries without protracted study and lengthy experience: see Acts 4:13! "To another faith," a special gift which enabled its possessor to trust God in any emergency, and to boldly face a martyr's death: see Acts 6:5. The "gifts of healing" and "the working of miracles" are seen in their exercise by the Apostles in the Acts. "To another prophecy" or immediate inspiration and revelation from God. Upon "tongues" and their "interpretation" we shall have more to say later. Non-continuance of Extraordinary Gifts Now that all of these special impulses and extraordinary gifts of the Spirit were not intended to be perpetuated throughout this Christian dispensation, and that they have long since ceased, is clear from several conclusive considerations. Their non-continuance is hinted at in Mark 16:20 by the omission of Christ's, "and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). So, too, by the fact that God did not give faith to His servants to count upon the same throughout the centuries: it is unthinkable that the intrepid Reformers and the godly Puritans failed to appropriate God's promise if any

had been given to that effect. "Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away" (1 Cor. 13:8). The Apostle cannot there be contrasting Heaven with earth, for those on High possess more "knowledge" than we have; so the reference must be to the cessation of the miraculous gifts of 1 Corinthians 12. The qualifying language "which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us . . . with signs and wonders" (Heb. 2:3, 4) points in the same direction, and clearly implies that those supernatural manifestations had even then ceased. Finally, 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 proves conclusively that there is now no need for such gifts as prophecy and tongues: we are "thoroughly furnished" by the now complete Canon of Scripture.

Practice of Gifts in the Church Meeting Our discussion upon the Person and work of the Holy Spirit would lack completeness if we ignored the fantastic and fanatical view which some have taken regarding 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 as the Divine pattern and ideal for "the open meeting" of the local church today. We refer to those who decry a "one-man ministry" and who encourage an "any-man minis-try" under the guise of allowing the Spirit full freedom to move and use any whom Christ has "gifted." It is insisted that here in 1 Corinthians 14 we behold different ones endowed with various gifts taking part in the same meeting, yet strange to say these very people readily acknowledge that the gift of tongues has ceased—but this very chapter prescribes how that gift was and was not to be used! Now in the first place there is not a single statement in all the New Testament that the practice which obtained at Corinth prevailed generally in other churches of that day, still less that the assemblies of the saints in all generations were to be patterned after their order. Rather is there much to show that what obtained at Corinth was not the regular mode established by Christ and His Apostles. The fact is that not only were the conditions at Corinth merely transitory and exceptional, but they were fraught with much evil. In no other church of apostolic days was there such disorder and carnality. "Gifts" were valued there more highly than grace, knowledge than love, and the consequence was that the possessors of those miraculous gifts, by their pride and forwardness, neutralized whatever good those gifts accomplished. The reason for that is not far to seek: they had no governing head or heads and no Divinely authorized teacher or teachers. The absence of elders made them like an army without officers, or a school without masters. Where all were equal, none would submit; where all wanted to teach, none would learn. So far from the Corinthian church supplying a pattern for all others to follow, it stands before us a most solemn warning and sample of what ensues when a company of Christians is left without a Divinely qualified leader. The most terrible laxity of discipline obtained: one member was living in adultery with his father's second wife (5:1), while others were getting drunk at the Lord's table (11:21). Those fearful sins (which would not be tolerated today in any Christian church worthy of the name) were winked at, because the assembly was split into parties through want of a controlling head (an under-shepherd of Christ), and because the sinning members belonged to the majority, the minority was powerless. Besides the fearful laxity of discipline, the grossest irregularities prevailed at their public meetings for the worship of God. There was neither unity, order, edifying ministry, nor decorum. One had his "psalm," another his "doctrine," another his "tongue," another his "revelation," and yet another his "interpretation" (1 Cor. 14:26)—which is mentioned by the Apostle not by way of commendation, but as a rebuke for their disorder, as is quite evident from the final clause of that verse, as also from verse 40: carefully compare the opening words of verses 15 and 26! As another has said, "Here, then, all were charged, as it were, to the muzzle, and each wanting to have the first say, the longest say, and the loudest say. They did not wish to edify, but to show off." Now it was in view of such a situation that the Apostle was moved of God to pen 1 Corinthians 14, in order to correct these abuses and to lay down rules for the regulation of those who possessed the extraordinary gifts of prophesying and speaking in tongues. But this very fact at once over-throws that theory which has been built on an erroneous conception of this chapter! Not only is there not a single statement elsewhere in the

New Testament that the Holy Spirit is the President over assemblies, or that He is ever present in any other sense than that He dwells in individual believers, but 1 Corinthians 14 itself is very far from teaching that the Spirit presides over the local church, and requires those who have been "gifted" by Christ to wait on Him, and be governed entirely by His inward promptings. Surely it is perfectly obvious that inward promptings of the Spirit render quite needless such rules and regulations as are given here! To affirm that "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" (v. 32), that is, their "gift" of prophecy is under the Prophet's own control, is a vastly different thing from saying that the prophets were to be subject to the Holy Spirit! No matter how strong was the impulse to speak, he could not rightly defy the command given, "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge" (v. 29) under the plea that the Spirit urged him to speak. So again, how easy it had been for the Apostle to affirm, "If the Spirit impel anyone to speak in a tongue, He will move some other brother to translate"; but so far from that, he commanded, "But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church" (v. 28), which utterly demolishes the idea that these Corinthians were being presided over by the Holy Spirit. Nowhere in 1 Corinthians 14 is it stated that the Spirit conducted (or ought to conduct) their meetings, nor were the Corinthians rebuked for failing to look to Him for guidance. There is not a hint of their sinfulness in limiting His sovereign freedom among them! Instead, the Apostle says, "I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied" (v. 5), and, "I had rather speak five words with my understanding . . . than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue" (v. 19) which he most certainly had not said if his theme here was the Spirit's superintendence, for in that case the Apostle would have gladly and entirely subjected himself to His control. Throughout the entire chapter the Apostle presents action as coming from the side of the possessors of the gifts, and not from the side of the Spirit. It is not, "when ye come together the Spirit will move one to speak in a tongue, another to prophecy, etc." No, they are bidden to use good sense, to show their love to one another by subjection, and to beware of shocking visitors (vv. 20, 23). But enough. As there were offices extraordinary (Apostle and Prophets) at the beginning of our dispensation, so there were gifts extraordinary; and as successors were not appointed for the former, so a continuance was never intended for the latter. The gifts were dependent upon the officers: see Acts 8:14-21; 10:44-46; 19:6; Romans 1:11; Galatians 3:5; 2 Timothy 1:6. We no longer have the Apostles with us, and therefore the supernatural gifts (the communication of which was an essential part of "the signs of an Apostle": 2 Cor. 12:12) are absent. None but a Prophet can "prophesy!" Let it be definitely noted that the "Prophet" and the "teacher" are quite distinct: 1 Corinthians 12:28, 29; Ephesians 2:20; 3:5—the one is no more, the latter still exists. A Prophet was inspired by God to give out an infallible communication of His mind: 2 Peter 1:21. Surely it is a manifest absurdity, then, to take a chapter which was given for the express purpose of regulating the exercise of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, and apply it to a company today where none of those gifts exist! Furthermore, if 1 Corinthians 14 sets forth the Spirit's superintendence of the local assembly in worship, why is it that there is not a single mention of Him throughout the whole of its 40 verses? That is indeed a hard question to answer. Obviously, there has been read into it what is not there! But do we not still have the "word of wisdom" and "the word of knowledge"? Certainly not; they were among the spiritual gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:1, and that word "spiritual" is not used there in contrast from "carnal" (as is clear from 1 Cor. 3:1, for they were not spiritual in that sense), so that it must mean inspired, and "inspired" men ceased when the Canon of Scripture was closed! It is true that the Spirit acts today, but it is in secret, and not in open manifestation as in the days of the Apostles; and by mixed agency. The Truth is taught, but not perfectly as the Apostles and their delegates preached it. The best sermon now preached or article written, is not a standard (as it would be if inspired by the Spirit), for it has blemishes in it; yet the Spirit is not responsible for them. What the Spirit does now is to bestow ordinary ministerial gifts, which the possessor must improve and develop by study and use. To "seek power from High" or a special "filling of

the Spirit" is to run the serious risk of being controlled by evil spirits posing as angels of light.

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