

The Experience of a Believer

by J.C. Philpot

The experience of a believer parallels the history of the church, with both dependent on the Lord for spiritual life and prosperity, and experiencing marked periods of spiritual prosperity and decline.

Scripture: Isaiah 44:3, Jeremiah 2:13, John 15:5, Acts 2:1, Revelation 2:4

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Holy Spirit"

Description

J.C. Philpot draws a parallel between the history of the church and the experience of a believer, emphasizing their interconnectedness and dependence on the Lord for spiritual life and prosperity. He highlights how both the church and individual believers go through seasons of spiritual prosperity marked by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, leading to fruitfulness and flourishing. Philpot also discusses the presence of an elect remnant within the church and in individual believers who lament over spiritual decline and testify against it, showing a shared experience of conviction and longing for revival.

Transcript

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There is a striking similarity between the history of the church and the experience of a believer. Nor is this coincidence casual, but necessarily connected with their mutual position, the body and the members being affected by the same circumstances, and being dependent on the same causes of health or decay. Thus the first is as the volume of which the second is a page; the one being the history of centuries, and the other the record of a life.

This similarity embraces several particulars.

1. The first and main point of coincidence lies in this--that both are dependent for their spiritual life and prosperity on the Lord their Head. The church is his body, of which individual believers are separate members; and without him neither body nor members can do anything. He is "the Way" in which both walk; "the Truth" in which both believe; and "the Life" in which both live.

2. But besides this similarity in point of dependence, there is also a striking resemblance in point of experience. Thus in the history of the church there are certain marked periods, or, as they are usually called, "epochs," of spiritual prosperity when the Lord's presence and power were peculiarly manifested.

As these seasons were wholly due to the special pouring out of the Holy Spirit, (according to the Scripture promise, "I will pour out my Spirit upon you") they have been termed "effusions" of the Holy Spirit. The first of these, and the type and pattern of all succeeding, though immeasurably exceeding them in power and glory, was that most memorable one, on the day of Pentecost. The early and the latter rain spoken of in the prophets seem to represent in type and figure the beauty and blessedness of these gracious effusions.

Now, as long as these showers fell on the church, she flourished. It was generally with her a time of outward persecution and trouble; but as her afflictions abounded her consolations abounded also, and she "looked forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." But when these gracious effusions were withheld, like a field deprived of rain, she gradually declined in fruitfulness. Thus the history of the church presents an alternation of fruitfulness and barrenness, restoration and decline, life and death, summer and winter, resurrection and decay. Herein they experience of the church corresponds with the experience of its spiritual members.

There are few of the children of God who cannot look back to certain marked periods in their experience when the blessed Spirit worked powerfully in their hearts. Their first convictions or their first blessings--their spirit of supplication or their spirit of hearing--the sweet manifestations of Christ--the marked answers to prayer--the love they felt to the brethren--the willingness to make sacrifices and suffer persecution for the truth's sake--these and similar bright and blessed spots in Christian experience correspond in the individual to the effusions of which we have spoken as marking certain epochs in the church. And their coldness, deadness, and barrenness, when the Spirit's influences are withheld, correspond to the periods in the history of the church of decline and decay.

3. A third point of similarity may be also noticed. When the church has declined into coldness and death, the Lord has at all periods preserved in her an elect remnant who sigh and cry on account of Zion's declension, and testify as faithful witnesses against the condition into which she has fallen. Here too the experience of the individual coincides with the experience of the church. In the bosom of a child of God, however low the soul may have sunk into carnality and lukewarmness, there is still a sigh and a cry on account of the abominations. The soul is inwardly sensible of its backslidings, its coldness, deadness, and declension; and conscience, as a faithful witness for God, unbribed and unbribable, unsilenced and unsilenceable, will ever and anon raise up its voice and testify against the forsaking of the Fountain of living waters, to hew out cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water.

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