

The Wisdom of Men and the Power of God

by J.C. Philpot

J.C. Philpot's sermon emphasizes the contrast between the humility of true ministry and the arrogance often found in modern preachers, highlighting the need for reliance on God's power over human wisdom.

Scripture: Isaiah 29:8, Isaiah 66:2, Jeremiah 5:22, 1 Corinthians 2:3, 1 Thessalonians 1:5

Topics: "Faith And Power", "Spiritual Wisdom"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about the contrast between the apostle Paul's experience and language, standing in weakness, fear, and trembling, and the common ministers of the gospel who rely on enticing words of man's wisdom. He challenges the prevalent reliance on human wisdom in preaching and the need for a demonstration of the Spirit and power in faith. Philpot emphasizes the importance of a faith that stands in the power of God, not in the wisdom of men, to ensure true conviction, endurance, and fruitfulness in the Christian walk.

Transcript

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"And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power- that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." 1 Cor. 2:3-5

What a contrast there is between the experience and language of the apostle Paul, and the experience and language of thousands who profess to be servants of God and preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This may seem to some a harsh, censorious statement, but before it is hastily condemned let us see whether it be founded on truth or not. Take, then, a wide and general survey of those who call themselves and are generally considered to be the ministers of the gospel at the present day. Taking together Church and Dissent, we may safely assume that there are at least twenty thousand men in this country who profess to be servants of God and ministers of Jesus Christ. For bear in mind that they are either this or nothing, no, worse than nothing, for if a man calls himself a minister he necessarily calls himself thereby a minister of Christ, unless he would brand his own name and character as that of an impostor, and thus proclaim himself to his own shame a servant of the world and a minister of Satan.

Now of these twenty thousand men, illness, old age, and infirmities, love of ease and sloth or other circumstances may furnish a quota of five thousand idlers, or unemployed, such as sinecurist rectors, silent curates, or unattached ministers of various denominations who sigh for a pulpit but sigh in vain. These, then, we will set aside as willingly or unwillingly silent, and assume that fifteen thousand are standing up this morning in the name of God to preach what they call the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now out of this numerous host, fifteen thousand men, how many, in the largest exercise of charity, could we find whose experience or whose language correspond with that of the apostle Paul as expressed in the text? And yet I dare say we would highly offend every one of them if we even hinted that they did not preach the same gospel which he preached, or serve the same Lord whom he served.

How apt most are to take things upon trust, at least in religion, without search, inquiry, or examination. Let men pass through a certain fixed course of study, let them be ordained by some competent and acknowledged authority, let them claim or assume certain titles, let them wear a certain dress, and at once they are received as ministers of Jesus Christ. The mode may differ, but in this point Church and Dissent fully agree. Hence arise the many thousands of whom I have spoken.

But such a mixed and miscellaneous company may almost remind us of Gideon's army, the thirty-two thousand men who were summoned with the trumpet to make war against the Midianites. They formed to the eye a mighty army- all of them soldiers ready for the battle. But though thus gathered together as soldiers of the Lord's army, God saw them not as men or even as Gideon saw them. The Lord therefore said unto Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many." He next bade him proclaim in the ears of the people, "Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from Mount Gilead." This at once made a clean sweep of twenty-two thousand. The conscious cowards availed themselves of this ticket of leave, and hurried off from the camp by morning light. Would not a similar proclamation, in spirit if not in the letter, were there any sufferings to be undergone, any hard fighting to be endured, any sacrifice of money, prosperity, or character to be made, have almost similar consequences with our modern army of ministers? How fearful and afraid would a large number of these warriors be of losing their reputation, or their salary, or their congregations, or of offending the world, their wives, their children, or their relations. We would soon find what a clear sweep such a proclamation would make if carried out. How many would stand the test if persecution were to be undergone, or any sacrifices to be made of property, not to say of life?

But even then there were too many left with Gideon after they were departed. The ten thousand, who were more stout-hearted than their fellows, were still too many to do the Lord's work and fight the Lord's battles. There was another sweep to be made by the test of coming down to the water. Those that bowed down upon their knees to drink; and those that lapped putting their hand to their mouth, were to be distinguished and separated from one another. The former, typical of the carnal who drink of God's favors in providence recklessly and unthankfully, bury as it were lips, mouth, and all in the stream of prosperity without the intervention of faith, were sent away every one to his place.

Is it not too true that money is the chief aim of thousands who seek after the ministry? And what they thus get they receive as their right, their lawful tithes or their fixed salary, without receiving it in faith and gratitude as the gift of the Lord. Thus are they well represented by those in Gideon's host who drank by dipping their mouths in the water.

And how many were left who drank by lapping the water out of their hand- typical of those who receive by the hand of faith God's favors in providence and grace, and live a life of faith on the Son of God? Why,

only three hundred. Thus, out of this mighty host, there were only left at last three hundred to fight the Lord's battles.

Now if all the ministers in this land who are destitute of a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who receive their salaries and incomes, tithes and offerings as their rightful due without receiving them from the hand of the Lord in faith, love, and gratitude, were similarly set apart, would not this make a mighty sweep? And though I have neither the right nor the wish, nor even the means or opportunity of making any such calculation, I can but express my opinion that it would be happy for England were there only three hundred men out of all the professed ministers of Jesus Christ who could use the language of the apostle Paul as "determined to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and him crucified;" and whose "speech and whose preaching was not with enticing words of men's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Yes, I repeat it, it would be a happy day were there as many men to preach the gospel in our beloved country as there were men to fight the battle of the Lord under Gideon among the Midianites!

But to leave men and come to things, for I shall neither weary you nor myself with a longer introduction, let us then see whether we can find in our text anything that may be for our instruction, edification, or consolation this morning. The apostle tells us in it both his weakness and his strength, his fears and his hopes, what he renounced and what he held fast, what fruit he desired, and what fruit he found as a minister of Jesus Christ.

See him, then, first, in the weakness of his confession- "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling."

See him, secondly, in the honesty of his renunciation- "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom."

See him, thirdly, in the strength of his preaching- "But in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

See him, fourthly, in the fruit of his testimony- "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

I. See Paul in the WEAKNESS OF HIS CONFESSION- "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." It may seem at first sight surprising to us that a man of such eminent natural abilities- and I suppose few men who ever lived possessed by nature a larger mind; a man so specially called by divine revelation; a man of such deep and varied experience, as we find him when speaking of himself in Romans 7 and other passages; a man who had been caught up into the third heaven and there seen and heard unspeakable sights and words; a man so gifted with eloquence that there is scarcely his equal to be found even among the greatest orators of classical antiquity- that this man, so richly furnished by nature and so thoroughly qualified by grace should come before a few poor people at Corinth, all of whom were as inferior to himself naturally and spiritually, as one man could be to another, and yet be "with them in weakness and in fear and in much trembling."

How can we explain this? Let us see whether we can get into the mystery; for we do not see much of it in our modern preachers. They are certainly not Pauls in preaching, whether we view their abilities, or their gifts, or their grace. Why then should they not also be "in weakness, fear, and trembling," when they have so much less to support them in the work of the ministry than he had? It is indeed one of those mysteries which are hidden from the eyes of the wise and prudent, and revealed to babes. Some little personal experience however of the mystery will be the best clue through the labyrinth, the best solution of the

enigma.

A. The first thing which this man of God felt in the exercise of his ministry was weakness.

1. It might have been in part BODILY weakness. A man could hardly have passed through what he endured without its leaving some marked effects upon the body. "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus," he says to the Galatians. (Gal. 6:17.) He gives us, in another epistle, a catalogue of his bodily sufferings for Christ's sake- "Five different times the Jews gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea." (2 Cor. 11:24, 25.) And after enumerating a variety of "perils," he adds those touching words- "I have lived with weariness and pain and sleepless nights. Often I have been hungry and thirsty and have gone without food. Often I have shivered with cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of how the churches are getting along." (2 Cor. 11:27, 28.) This long series of bodily sufferings must have told upon his strength and constitution, and made him prematurely old, so that in writing to Philemon, when he could not have been above 56 or 57 years of age, a time of life when many ministers are in the prime of their strength, he calls himself "Paul the aged." Knowing so much myself of bodily weakness, and feeling it at the present moment, I have perhaps, invalid-like, dwelt too long on this point, and therefore shall not press it any farther.

2. But whether this bodily weakness were little or much, it was as nothing compared with his SPIRITUAL weakness. And was there not good reason why he should deeply and continually feel this? Look at the continual drain upon him by the thorn in the flesh- that running sore, of which the effect would be to drain away all his creature strength. It is true that he was so blessedly supported under his infirmities, and the strength of Christ made so perfect in them, that he could even glory and take pleasure in them; but infirmities still they were, and were felt by him as such. And what does infirmity mean but weakness? Look also at the continual conflict which he had with his corrupt nature, as described so vividly and so graphically in Romans 7. He could not go through that without its bringing down all the strength of his natural heart. Even the very manifestations of Christ and the glorious revelations with which he was so singularly and blessedly favored, though he was strengthened by them to endure all things for the elect's sake, yet weakened and brought down his natural strength; for we know that any great discoveries of the love and goodness of God have a powerful effect upon the natural frame; for in its present condition, neither body nor mind can bear much excess of sorrow or joy, especially of a spiritual nature. How strikingly was this the case with the prophet Daniel- "As for me, Daniel, my cogitations much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me." So also- "Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me- for my loveliness was turned into corruption, and I retained no strength." (Dan. 10:8.) And again, he says, "O my Lord, by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no strength." (Dan. 10:16.) Similarly we may well suppose that Paul, in one sense, sank, though in another he rose under the weight of his glorious manifestations. There were therefore abundant reasons why he should stand before the people in weakness.

But consider also the burdens he had to carry, such as the responsibility of his position as an ambassador of Christ, so deeply felt by him; the difficulties he had to contend with from within and from without, all standing in formidable array against him and the gospel which he had to preach; his sense of the value of immortal souls, to whom his ministry was addressed; the pressure of eternal realities ever abiding on his spirit, with many deep and solemn thoughts of that day in which all secrets are to be laid bare. Is there a man who knows anything of spiritual exercises who does not also know what weakness is, from this very circumstance, that all the power of nature fails and falls when it comes into contact with divine and eternal

realities? But the very nature of his message, the very subject of his preaching, the very character of his testimony were such as made him stand up in weakness. For what was it? What Mr. Deer well calls in his 'Experience', prefixed to his hymns, "the despised mystery of a crucified man."

Yes; to let Paul speak in his own language- "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." (1 Cor. 2:1, 2.) He well knew what this preaching would be considered to be, and that Christ crucified would be "unto the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness." Though he knew that the foolishness of God, as men counted it, was wiser than men, and the weakness of God stronger than men, yet having such a testimony to bear- so strange, so unheard of, so despised by, and so abhorrent alike to Jew and Gentile, he could not but feel the weakness of himself as a preacher of the despised cross.

O that we could see more of this felt and acknowledged weakness in the professed servants of God! It would make them and their testimony far more acceptable than it now is to the living family. It is painful for the minister himself to feel. I never felt it more or perhaps so much as I do now, but it is good for the people that the minister should feel it, that he may seek and find the strength of Christ made perfect in it.

B. But Paul had also his FEAR. What fear was this? Certainly not "the fear of a man that brings a snare"- such a carnal fear we cannot find a trace of in the man or his ministry. His fear was of another kind, and arose from quite other causes. It arose, then, partly from a solemn apprehension of the Majesty of God- a reverence and holy awe of that great and glorious Lord with whom he had to do. Blended with this, there was a godly fear lest he might in any way by a misplaced word, or by any unwary action, put a stumbling block in the way of any seeker after or lover of truth, or that he might not commend himself as a servant of God to the people's conscience with such authority, power, and evidence as he would wish.

Let us not forget that as a man he had all these infirmities. They cleaved to him as they cleaved to us. What he wrote to the Churches he wrote by divine inspiration, and of his ministry generally, as an apostle of the Lord, he could say, "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches; comparing spiritual things with spiritual." (1 Cor. 2:13.) But that he had his fears is evident from his own words- "Without were fightings, within were fears." (2 Cor. 7:5.) And that these fears did not arise from cowardice, unwillingness to suffer persecution for Christ's sake, dread of death or even martyrdom, is equally evident from his boldness under the most trying circumstances, as when he would, but for the disciples preventing him, have entered in unto the people at Ephesus, when they were like wild beasts ready to tear him to pieces in the very theater. (Acts 19:29-31.) It was not then that he feared the cross, as to his own share of suffering, but lest the preaching of the cross should not meet with the longed-for reception. United with this, was a sense of the powerlessness of man, both in himself to give, and in them to receive any blessing from the preaching of the cross, and lest his testimony should in any way fall to the ground.

C. A sense of all these things, combined with others into which we cannot penetrate, for who can but partially read the heart of an apostle? so deeply affected him as to make him tremble, and that in no small degree. "I was with you in weakness and in fear, and in much TREMBLING." Not that he trembled through any carnal apprehension of his hearers, but under a sense of the greatness of the work, his own inability rightly to perform it, the message he had to carry, and the powers of earth and hell arrayed against it. He had felt the power of God's word upon his heart, and this made him tremble. This is an especial mark of the Lord's saints and servants. "To this man will I look, even to him that is of a poor and contrite spirit, and

trembles at my word." (Isa. 66:2.) "Do you not fear me, says the Lord? Will you not tremble at my presence?" (Jer. 5:22.)

Even a sense of God's goodness makes the soul tremble as with holy awe. It was so with Daniel, for though the Lord said, "O Daniel, a man greatly beloved," yet we read, "When he had spoken this word, I stood trembling." (Dan. 10:11.) And this made Jeremiah say, "They shall fear and tremble for all the goodness, and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it." (Jer. 33:9.) Thus Paul stood, as every servant of God will in a measure stand, and just in proportion to his knowledge of divine realities for himself, before these few poor Corinthians, "in weakness and in fear, and in much trembling."

What a noble, what an honorable confession! What humility, sincerity, and honesty! What a pattern and example for every servant of God. But I may well add, what a solemn rebuke to the levity manifested in too many a pulpit in the present day. What a keen and cutting reproof, too, of that arrogance, pride, self-conceit, vain confidence, and daring presumption in which so many men stand who profess to preach the gospel of the grace of God. What? that Paul, compared with whom they are but pygmies in the presence of a giant; that Paul, who had more grace in his little finger, than they in all their body; that this man of such deep experience, unrivaled eloquence, and powerful gifts should be in weakness, fear, and much trembling; and that they should stand up in such arrogant pretension as if they were warranted to be strong where an apostle was weak, they to presume where a man of God feared, and they to be bold where he who had been in the third heaven trembled!

I hope I can say for myself, that I stand up before you this morning, for the first time of my visit this year, in a little of the same spirit of which the apostle speaks. In weakness of body you all know and can probably see; but in weakness too of soul, which is better felt by preacher and hearer than seen. In fear too, as feeling my own inability to preach the word of life as I would desire to preach it, and my dependence on the Lord for every gracious thought and word. The apostle could say, "in much trembling." I must omit the word "much," for I have not his experience or grace; yet would I wish to tremble at God's word. And if I do not actually tremble before you, it is not from levity, arrogance, or presumption, as I sensibly feel my inability to handle the things of God with that light, life, and liberty which I desire, and feeling in some measure the solemn matters which I have to dispense, and the opposition raised up against them by the power of unbelief in my own heart, and the power of unbelief in yours.

II. But we pass on to the nature and character of the apostle's RENUNCIATION. "My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom."

He gives us two sides of his preaching, the negative and the positive, what it was not and what it was, what he renounced and what he held fast by. Our present point, therefore, is what I have called the honesty of his renunciation.

By "man's wisdom," we may understand, all that wisdom which a man can actually acquire by his own exertions or the exertions of others, and especially that branch of it whereby he addresses himself to the art of persuasion, for the apostle speaks of "enticing words of man's wisdom." The word "enticing" is in the margin "persuasive," or, as we now say, "persuasive." It includes, therefore, every branch of skillful oratory, whether it be logical reasoning to convince our understanding, or appeals to our feelings to stir up our passions, or new and striking ideas to delight our intellect, or beautiful and eloquent language to please and captivate our imagination. All these "enticing words" of man's wisdom- the very things which our popular preachers most speak and aim at, this great apostle renounced, discarded, and rejected. He

might have used them all if he liked. He possessed, as I have already said, an almost unequalled share of natural ability, great learning according to the learning of the day, a singularly keen, penetrating intellect, a wonderful command of the Greek language, a flow of ideas most varied, striking, and original, and powers of oratory and eloquence such as have been given to few. He might therefore have used enticing words of man's wisdom, had he wished or thought it right to do so, but he would not- he saw what deceptiveness was in them, and at best they were mere arts of oratory. He saw that these enticing words, though they might touch the natural feelings, work upon the passions, captivate the imagination, convince the understanding, persuade the judgment, and to a certain extent force their way into men's minds; yet when all was done that could thus be done, it was merely man's wisdom which had done it; and as I shall presently show, that the faith which stood in that wisdom could rise no higher than its source, and would drop when nature dropped and fell.

Earthly wisdom cannot communicate heavenly faith. He would not therefore use enticing words of man's wisdom, whether it were force of logical argument, or appeal to natural passions, or the charms of vivid eloquence, or the beauty of poetical composition, or the subtle nicety of well arranged sentences. He would not use any of these enticing words of man's wisdom to draw people into a profession of religion, when their heart was not really touched by God's grace, or their consciences wrought upon by a divine power. So to work upon their reasoning faculties, so to insinuate the truth into their judgment, so to take captive their natural intellect, so bend their neck to the gospel yoke; without their first learning of him who was meek and lowly in heart, he well knew would neither save their souls nor glorify God.

He came to win souls for Jesus Christ, not converts to his own powers of oratorical persuasion; to turn men from darkness to light; and from the power of Satan unto God, not to charm their ears by poetry and eloquence; to bring them out of the vilest of sins that they might be washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God, and not entertain or amuse their minds while sin and Satan still maintained dominion in their hearts. This was unworthy of the position which he occupied as an ambassador of God, unbecoming the place he stood in as a minister of Jesus Christ. It was having recourse to subtlety, which was not becoming that godly profession which he maintained, that tenderness of conscience which he was possessed of, that reverence of God with which he was deeply imbued, and the way in which he desired to approve himself as God's own sent and commissioned servant. Those converts, if they were worthy of the name, who were so gained would not have stood out to the end, nor eventually proved themselves to be children of God and vessels of mercy. Fish caught in that net would have to be thrown back into the sea. Corn sown, grown, and reaped in that field when put into the mill would never become meal sufficiently fine to make bread to be put upon the Master's table. A flock brought together by such arts would have to be separated by the keen eye and hand of the great Shepherd from the fold of his own gathering and feeding.

All the labor spent in bringing together a church and congregation of professing people by the power of logical argument and appeals to their natural consciences would be utterly lost, as regards fruit for eternity; for a profession so induced by him and so made by them would leave them just as they were, in all the depths of unregeneracy, with their sins unpardoned, their persons unjustified, and their souls unsanctified. He discarded therefore all these ways of winning over converts as unbecoming his position, as unworthy of the office he occupied, as deceitful to the souls of men, and as dishonoring to God. It required much grace to do this, to throw aside what he might have used, and renounce what most men, as gifted as he, would have gladly used- for he occupied a peculiar position. He spoke at Corinth among a people highly cultivated, and to whom such a ministry would have been very acceptable. It was at this

period the grand metropolis of Greece, famed for its commerce, as most beautifully and conveniently situated between two seas; and though not equal to Athens as a place of philosophy, poetry, and the higher arts, yet as a great commercial center, it was thronged both with inhabitants and visitors from all parts of Greece, Italy, and Asia; and as wealth increased so did luxury and refinement, not only in vice but in the cultivation of the arts and sciences of that day.

It was therefore of all places one of the most difficult to which to come as Paul did, with a simple, unadorned testimony of a crucified Christ; for "the Greeks sought after wisdom," and prized oratory and eloquence in a degree of which we now have little conception. They possessed a most expressive and beautiful language, adapted above all others to oratory, whether to convince the intellect, sway the passions, or charm the ear. What a temptation therefore to Paul to employ this weapon and to win them over by meeting them on that ground on which he was so well qualified to stand. But no; grace had taught him that it was not by human might or creature power, but by the Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.

What a lesson is here for ministers. How anxious are some men to shine as great preachers. How they covet and often aim at some grand display of what they call eloquence to charm their hearers, and win praise and honor to self. How others try to argue men into religion, or by appealing to their natural feelings, sometimes to frighten them with pictures of hell, and sometimes to allure them by descriptions of heaven. But all such arts, for they are no better, must be discarded by a true servant of God, and he must be willing and desirous to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

III. But we will now endeavor to show the AFFIRMATIVE side of the question- what Paul's ministry was as opposed to what it was not- what I have called the strength of his preaching- "My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Let me endeavor to unfold the meaning of these words, and show how widely and blessedly they differ from the "enticing words of man's wisdom."

1. What, then, first, are we to understand by the expression "demonstration of the Spirit?" By the word 'demonstration' we generally understand a mode of proof so complete that there can remain not a shadow of doubt that the point is proved beyond all possibility of its ever being disputed, much more overthrown. It is a mathematical term; and those who have learned even the first principles of mathematical reasoning fully understand what demonstration means; for in that science not a single point is advanced, nor a step taken in the argument, which is not fully and clearly demonstrated, that is, proved beyond the shadow of a doubt. The apostle, therefore, in addressing himself to a people who thoroughly knew the meaning of the term, for mathematics were much studied in that day, adopts that word and applies it to spiritual things; in other words, he lays it down as a fundamental truth, that there is such a demonstration by the power of the Spirit of the things of God to a man's soul, that he is as certain of the truth and reality of those things as a mathematician can be satisfied with the demonstration of a mathematical problem.

It is perfectly true that whole mode of proof differs both in its subject, nature, and end. Nothing can more widely differ than nature and grace, reason and revelation, the teaching of man and the teaching of God, the properties of an angle or a circle and the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. But the soul requires proof as well as the mind, the heart as well as the head, the conscience as well as the intellect- different indeed in kind because they so widely differ in nature, but agreeing in this, that neither is fully satisfied unless the point is so fully settled, so completely and thoroughly determined, that no doubt whatever can rest upon the matter. In human reasoning, demonstration cannot usually be obtained except in mathematics, but not so in divine. There grace outshines and exceeds nature, for the teaching and

testimony of the blessed Spirit is always demonstrative, that is, convincing beyond the possibility of doubt. Even in his first work as the conviction of sin his proof is demonstrative. None who have felt the guilt, weight, and burden of sin can doubt that they are sinners, none who have felt the anger of the Almighty can doubt his wrath against transgression and transgressors. Indeed nothing short of the Spirit's illuminating power, his vivifying, renewing, and regenerating grace, and the authority with which he accompanies the word of God to the soul, can ever produce that demonstration of eternal realities, whereby we believe them as beyond the shadow of a doubt.

But if this be true, whence comes it that so many of the family of God, except at favored moments, are tossed up and down on a sea of doubts and fears, so that what they believe they seem hardly able to realize with such clearness and certainty that it is put beyond the shadow of a doubt? This does not arise from divine teaching. It is not the work of the Spirit to produce doubts and fears, but to overcome them. And yet we are continually subject to them. Infidel thoughts fly across the mind; doubts and questionings suggest themselves; Satan is busy in plying his arguments; a guilty conscience falls too readily under his accusations; painful recollections of past slips, falls, and backslidings strengthen the power of unbelief, so that to come to a spot wherein there is not the least shadow of a doubt of divine realities, and, what is far more, of our own saving interest in them, is a rare circumstance, and only attainable at those favored moments when the Lord is pleased to shine into the soul and settle the matter between himself and our conscience.

But these very doubts, these very questionings, these cutting, killing fears, these anxious questionings work together for good, and are mercifully overruled for our spiritual benefit. What else has brought us to this point that nothing short of demonstration will satisfy the soul really born and taught of God? It must have demonstration- nothing else will do. We cannot live and die upon uncertainties. It won't do to be always in a state that we don't know whether we are going to heaven or hell; to be tossed up and down on a sea of uncertainty, scarcely knowing who commands the ship, what is our destination, what our present course, or what will be the end of the voyage.

Now all human wisdom leaves us upon this sea of uncertainty. It is useful in nature but useless in grace. It is foolish and absurd to despise all human learning, wisdom, and knowledge. Without them we would be a horde of wild, wandering savages. But it is worse than foolish to make human wisdom our guide to eternity, and make human reason the foundation of our faith or hope. What you thus believe today, you will disbelieve tomorrow; all the arguments that may convince your reasoning mind, all the appeals to your natural passions, which may seem for the time to soften your heart, and all the thoughts swaying to and fro which may sometimes lead you to hope you are right, and sometimes make you not fear you are wrong- all these will be found insufficient when the soul comes into any time of real trial and perplexity.

We need, therefore, demonstration to remove and dispel all these anxious questionings, and settle the whole matter firmly in our heart and conscience; and this nothing can give us but the Spirit by revealing Christ, taking of the things of Christ, and showing them unto us, applying the word with power to our hearts, and bringing the sweetness, reality, and blessedness of divine things into our soul. It is only in this way that he overcomes all unbelief and infidelity, doubt and fear, and sweetly assures us that all is well between God and the soul.

It is therefore not demonstration simply, not demonstration of the word, as if there were some innate proof and power in the word itself to demonstrate its own truth, though doubtless it is so when the Spirit shines upon it, but it is "the demonstration of the Spirit." This is very necessary to observe, for you will often hear

the word of God spoken of, as if the Bible possessed not only demonstrative proof of its own inspiration, but was able to give that demonstration to the souls of men. But the demonstration not of the word but of the Spirit in, through, and by the word, is the thing needed to convert sinners and satisfy saints. This is proof indeed, not cold and hard like mathematical demonstration; but warm, living, softening, and sanctifying, being the very light, life and power of God himself in the soul.

Now Paul's preaching was this demonstration of the Spirit. The Spirit of God speaking in him and by him so demonstrated the truth of what he preached that it came, as he elsewhere speaks, "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance." (1 Thess. 1:5.) There are now no Pauls; and yet, unless we have a measure of the same demonstration of the Spirit, all that is said by us in the pulpit drops to the ground; it has no real effect; there is no true or abiding fruit- no fruit unto eternal life. If there be in it some enticing words of man's wisdom, it may please the mind of those who are gratified by such arts; it may stimulate and occupy the attention for the time; but there it ceases, and all that has been heard fades away like a dream of the night; and, as regards the family of God, we may apply to all such preaching the words of the prophet- "It shall even be as when an hungry man dreams, and, behold, he eats; but he awakens, and his soul is empty- or as when a thirsty man dreams, and, behold, he drinks; but he awakens, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul has appetite." (Isa. 29:8.)

But anything which is communicated by the Holy Spirit, which is demonstrated by the Spirit to your soul, which is brought into your heart with light, life, and power, sealed and witnessed by that sacred Teacher and divine Comforter that abides; you take it home with you; it comforts you, not only at the time, but when you look back to it in days to come; it is a bright spot in your soul's experience, when you can believe that then and there God was pleased to bless his word to your soul, and seal it home with a sweet influence upon your conscience. This is "demonstration of the Spirit."

2. And where there is this, there is "power" for the apostle adds, "and of power." The grand distinguishing mark of the kingdom of God is, that "it is not in word, but in power." Thus power is given to believe in the Son of God- and we cannot believe truly and savingly in him until power is put forth; power to receive the Lord in all his covenant characters and gracious relationships in the gospel of his grace; power to believe that what God has done he does forever; power to come out of every doubt and fear into the blessed light and liberty of the truth which makes free. To feel, enjoy, and realize this power is what all the quickened saints of God are really seeking and longing for. And though some of them may not be able exactly to express what their souls are in search of, and without which they feel they are of all men the most miserable, yet they are inwardly sighing, seeking, and longing for power to attend the word of God to their souls, to lift them out of their darkness, doubt, and fear, and give them some sweet assurance that their sins are pardoned, their backslidings healed, and they themselves saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.

IV. But we now come to our fourth and last point- the anticipated FRUIT of the apostle's testimony. It was that the faith of those to whom he thus preached in demonstration of the Spirit and of power "should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

1. You see from this that there is a faith which "stands in the wisdom of men." Such a faith as this Paul would have nothing to do with. He knew how deceptive it was, and that it was a mere imitation of the faith of God's elect. He perfectly knew that such a faith was wrong in its beginning, wrong in its middle, and would be wrong in its end. If our faith have no other beginning than the wisdom of men, it can no more rise above that wisdom than water can rise above its level. A stream must always resemble its source, and can

never be purer or clearer than the fountain whence it springs. Thus, the faith which springs from human wisdom will at every part of its course be of the same nature as its fountain. And as its beginning and its middle, so will be its end. It will die with us when we die; it will come to an end with all human wisdom; it will perish with all the fruits of human intellect; when poetry, philosophy, eloquence, and oratory perish, then the faith which stands in these arts and artifices will perish with them. We may lay it down as a fixed axiom, that is, a certain and indisputable truth, that whatever is produced by the wisdom of men will die when human wisdom dies.

Now what can all the wisdom of man do for us in the solemn concerns of eternity? How helpless, how powerless is man's wisdom when we come to deal with God and conscience. A faith, therefore, which stands in that wisdom can endure no real trial. It vanishes on a bed of sickness. The least display of the anger of the Almighty, the least burden of guilt upon the conscience, the least fear of death burns it all up, and leaves it neither root nor branch. But what a miserable faith this must be to leave us just at the moment when we need it most. How dreadful the thought that we have been nursing a faith which, when we are stretched upon a bed of sickness, affords us no God to believe in, as our Father and our Friend; no Christ to look to as a Savior who has washed us from all our sins in his precious blood; no Holy Spirit to apply that precious blood to our conscience, and bring the promises home with sweetness and savor to our heart. What a state to be in, and have little else but darkness, confusion, fear, and dread shutting us up in distress and bondage.

2. But now look at the other side of the question. Let me assume that you have a faith which stands in the power of God, a faith which he was pleased at the first to breathe into your soul with his own mouth to communicate with his own heavenly breath, and raise up by his own powerful hand. Now this faith, though it may have been weak, and may still be weak, yet has had this peculiar mark attending it from its first implantation, that it has always stood in the power of God. As you were not able to give it yourself, you were never able to draw it forth into any living exercise. When it was weak, you could not strengthen it; when it was languishing, you could not revive it; and when you wanted to make use of it, it was not in your power to enjoy it to any satisfaction to your own mind, to any peace or rest in your own conscience. But it stood in the power of God. When he was pleased to draw it forth, then it acted; and when he revived it, then he lifted up its head. Such a faith as this stands in the power of God; and as standing in the power of God, it will have another mark of its coming from Him; it is a faith which will always be tried, and that to the utmost.

If our faith stood in the wisdom of men, we could always make use of it, and should never be tried about it. It would be like every other fruit of human skill or industry. Anything, for instance, that I may know, any knowledge which I may have acquired, I can always use. Ask me any question on any branch of learning or study, I can give an answer at any time, assuming that I know it. It is always at hand, ready for use, and I can take it out, and give you the time by it, as easily as if it were the watch in my waistcoat pocket. Similarly, you who are professional men, or engaged in business, whatever it be, or skilled artisans and mechanics, can always turn your hand to it; can always make use of the skill you possess or the knowledge you have acquired. Unless indeed you could do this, you would soon be without business, employment, work, or wages.

Now a faith which stands in the wisdom of men, is just what your knowledge or skill, ability or dexterity is in natural things. You find, therefore, people who can always believe just in the same way as you can always exercise your skill in business or work, or answer any question put to you which is connected with it, or deal readily and summarily with any matter with which you are acquainted, and which lies within your

peculiar province. So these people can always believe, because they believe in the same way as you understand your trade or profession, and can make use of it in the same way. But the children of God cannot do this, because their faith does not stand in the wisdom of men. If their faith stood in the wisdom of men, they could always use it, never be at a loss about it, and bring it forth into active and profitable employment, as a banker employs his capital to profitable use. That their faith is not thus at their own disposal, is so trying to the partakers of the faith of God's elect; and yet it is a strong proof that their faith stands in the power of God.

It is blessed enough when that power is put forth; but where and what are they when that power is suspended? Tried, deeply tried. They feel put into circumstances of great difficulty. They want to use their faith, and they cannot. If it stood in the wisdom of men, they could make use of it; but they find that they cannot make use of it. Why? simply from this circumstance- God has wrought a conviction deeply in their soul from the very first, that no other faith can do them any good but what stands in his power. The blessed Spirit taught them this lesson when he first convinced them of unbelief, and his lessons are for life. They are indelible, ineffaceable. They have tried the other kind of faith, for this they had, and plenty of it, in their days of unregeneracy, and found it lacking. Now those who have not this faith, the faith of which Jesus is the Author and Finisher, have not spiritual discernment to see what true faith is. They think they have faith. "Why should they not," they say, "have as good a faith as you? Why should they not believe as well and as rightly as you? Is there not the same God for them, and the same Christ, and the same grace as you claim for yourself, as if a privileged person, and if you were a partner in a monopoly of saving religion? Why should they not believe just as acceptably to God, just as savingly to themselves? Who are you to come and judge them, and say they have no faith? Why, they are as good as you, and better too any day, for they live above doubts and fears, in which you are muddling all your days!"

Aye, but God has taught you a little secret, which he has not taught them. He has taught you what faith is, and has made you to see that faith stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. And though you are often sadly pressed down with a sense of creature weakness, yet you know there have been times and seasons in your soul when you have felt the power; when you could say, "My Lord and my God!" when Jesus was revealed to you and in you; when you could take hold of him by faith, embrace him in the arms of love and affection, and feel him near, dear and precious to your soul. Those seasons taught you that your faith stood in the power of God.

But you would like it always to be so. You don't like to come into states and circumstances when you cannot have the full command of your faith. You are like a man who has a large business and a small capital; you cannot get the money when and as you want. You are therefore hedged up here and hedged up there, and cannot do as other people do, because you have not the capital which they have. Here is your neighbor with a large capital and a flourishing, daily increasing business. He carries the day, while you with your small capital can hardly get on. But, he after a time may be in difficulties, while your sinking head may be held up and you may come off with flying colors when he may have to put up his shutters. So it is in grace. These men with their strong faith are like some of our banks and discount houses in the late panic. Who doubted their stability? The Bank of England was thought no safer than one of them. But a sudden blast came upon them and down they fell like a house of cards. So some of these strong believers may go down some day like the banks lately broke, and for the same reason. They have been financing, trading with borrowed capital, and speculating with the wisdom of men, instead of depending upon the power of God. When such strong believers, as they count themselves and others count them, fall, it sadly stumbles many a child of God, as fearing in this general crash perhaps he may go next.

But the Lord is the strength of his heart; and his faith stands in the power of God and not in the wisdom of men. Thus, though it is the most trying place we can be well put into, to have a faith we cannot make use of when we want, yet after all it is turned into a blessing; because the Lord comes in at those times when all our creature faith comes to nothing. It is the unspeakable mercy of the saints of God that, at such seasons, the Lord sometimes comes in with his mighty grace and draws the faith which stands in his power into living exercise, revives it, puts fresh life into it, and smiles upon it with his own smile of approbation. It will be found in the end that the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, but that victory over every foe and every fear is assured to the poor, needy children of God.

The apostle had a large view of these things which I have this morning attempted to bring before you. I can only handle them with stumps; he could handle them with fingers. I can only drop a few fragmentary remarks just to cast a little light upon these two kinds of faith; but he had a large view of these matters, and a deep, spiritual insight into the difference between them both in their nature and origin, their course and their end. He was therefore determined, in the strength of God, to renounce all enticing words of man's wisdom, and seek for the power of God in his preaching and in their faith. Gladly would I walk in his footsteps, and discard all flattering operations, come to realities, solid bullion, sterling gold, and deal only with those matters which save the soul.

We may think it strange that a man of his abilities, learning, and great acquirements would stand before the people in weakness, fear, and in much trembling, and not use his intellect and employ his eloquence, or, as he might have done, carry all before him by the force of his words. But we see how the grace of God shines in him thereby. He dropped into that place where God should be all in all and he himself be nothing. And what was the fruit of this self-denial and this faith? We see how God honored his testimony, what a church of living saints was raised up in Corinth, who came behind in no gift of knowledge or utterance, and were called unto the fellowship of the Son of God.

I stand before you this morning in weakness and in fear, but with a sincere and earnest desire that my speech and my preaching may have been in some measure in a like demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith may not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God!

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