

The Power of a Disciplined Spirit

by John Follette

The sermon highlights the essential combination of power, love, and a disciplined spirit in building a fruitful Christian life.

Scripture: Acts 1:8, 1 Corinthians 13:1, Philippians 1:6, 2 Timothy 1:7, Revelation 1:9

Topics: "Spiritual Discipline", "Holy Spirit"

Description

John Follette preaches on the powerful impact the early Church had on nations, moving under the influence of sacrificial love ('agape') and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. He emphasizes the importance of being motivated by love in using spiritual gifts, as seen in 1 Corinthians 13. John highlights the need for a disciplined spirit ('sound mind') to accompany power and love, using the example of John, the 'Son of Thunder,' who was transformed by God's work on the Isle of Patmos.

Transcript

"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" 2 Timothy 1:7.

There was a manifestation of the life of Christ in the early Church that was powerful enough to move an entire nation. Rome was greatly affected by it, and nations ever since have been affected. Although the members of this early Church had received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and were used in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, there were "qualities" which were added to these gifts that caused this powerful impact upon nations.

Jesus said He would give us the power to become "His witnesses." This includes much more than the ability to do the works that He did. He was referring to a quality of life, an element of the Spirit which would become the "agape" of the Son of God resting within us. The early Church moved under the influence and power of this agape (sacrificial love) until all this became a dynamic in the hands of God by which He was able to affect and move a nation.

The first factor that is common to building a Christian life applies also in the building of the Church.

Thus, the tutoring that is directed toward the individual is also given for the whole Body. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses" Acts 1:8a. This is not speaking of "power" to go out and witness, for each individual should do this upon receiving salvation. This baptism is to be the dynamic (Greek - "dunamis") by which the Church will be built. Although Jesus teaches us the necessity of receiving this power, it is dangerous to allow its impact to overrule us. The same power that we feel when we are filled with the Spirit is the very power that can make us almost irrational with its moving. In response to a manifestation of this power, we feel we must do something, but we are not quite sure what it is. Then we become agitated and confused because the result is not what we expected. We must come to understand that another element is being added.

He has given us not only the power to become witnesses, but also the power of love. This word "love" is not an emotional love. It is "agape," a love that can only be measured by sacrifice. It is not "phileo," or brotherly love. The Lord wants us to distinguish between these words. "Agape" implies sacrifice; He tells us that He has loved us with this kind of love.

In building our spiritual life, the field of motivation must be carefully thought out. There must be a right motivation behind each manifestation, as we respond to the power of the Holy Spirit moving within us. The word used for love in this verse speaks of a love that motivates us to action. That which is motivated by the love of Jesus Christ, sacrificial "agape" love, will pass the test of time.

I Corinthians 13 is a beautiful chapter, but many never see the truth that is hidden within because they extract it from its setting. To understand the 13th chapter of I Corinthians, chapters 12, 13, and 14 must be read together as one. The gifts which are mentioned in chapter 12 are to be correctly motivated by the love shown in chapter 13.

The law that governs in this arrangement is not "a more excellent gift." For love is not a gift, rather it is a fruit. "Love" is the law by which the gifts are to operate. Why does the Lord say, "Yet shew I unto you a more excellent way?" Because the way the gifts had been used brought confusion into the Church. They had all of the gifts, but the motivating power behind them resulted in pride, disturbances, and

other problems. Therefore he says, "Yet shew I unto you a more excellent way (not thing). In other words, I will show you the motive that should govern the use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit."

Paul said that in the sight of God, their words sounded like a sounding of brass or a tinkling cymbal.

This was not what they were hearing, but what God heard. God was hearing confusion and noise.

Why? "Though I have all the gifts and the power to do all these things, if I do not have agape, that broken bleeding heart of Jesus, as the motive for the working of these gifts in my life, they will sound like a racket."

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity(agape), I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing" I Cor 13:1-2.

Notice that "I am nothing." It is not that the gift is nothing, rather "I" am nothing. "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth men nothing" I Cor 13:3. It may profit others, but it will not profit me unless agape, the love of God, is the motivating force.

What else does He say? "I have not only given you this gift of power along with love as the motive by which the gift will be manifest; I have also given you a sound mind." This word means a "disciplined spirit." We may have all of the gifts, properly motivated by the love of God, but if there is not a disciplined spirit to go along with them, their purposes will not be accomplished.

What is a disciplined spirit? This is a military term. Paul uses many military terms. The word here is used in connection with a general who has been disciplined in order to discipline in turn. He himself is under discipline so that the authority he now exercises will have credibility. One may have both power and love, but unless there is a "disciplined spirit" behind them, they will accomplish little.

When Jesus called James and John, He saw coming towards Him two young men whom He named "Sons of Thunder." God's hand was upon them, but they were not yet acquainted with its meaning. They were given authority to go out and minister, but John came back disturbed because the people in the city where he preached would not receive the Lord. John asked Jesus, "Do you want me to call down fire from heaven to consume them?" (Luke 9:54). John had the power to do this, because Jesus

had given it to him. Now John loved the Lord and wanted Him to be appreciated. Therefore, when His ministry was rejected, John wanted them to be punished.

The Lord turned to John and said, "You know not what spirit you are of." The difficulty was not in power, nor with love. This reaction was due to a problem in John's spirit. We must be motivated before we can accomplish anything for the Lord, but this is insufficient. John had both power and love, but his motivation was marred.

The difficulty was in the undiscovered, inner resources of John. There is yet territory to be taken within each of us, vast areas within our lives that are not yet conquered; and the Lord needs to triumph in them.

Power, love; each of these has their part. Now, a disciplined spirit is to be added. The Lord had seen John as a "Son of Thunder," but He did not intend to let him remain as such. He used John in places where he would be able to "thunder" for awhile. But the time came when God wanted to talk with him, so He took him to Patmos, a barren isolated island, where he had no one to "thunder" at. This was to be a time of quiet, a time to think, with nothing else to do.

The Lord was after John; He is after us, even more than He is interested in anything we will ever do for Him. When "you" have been set on an Isle like this by the Lord, be careful not to accept the suggestions of all those who are willing to row you back to where you were, because "you" are so needed. The Lord placed you there; let Him keep you there! People may attempt to hinder you, but be determined to make time and room for the Lord to make the necessary conquest within your life.

When the thunder had become silent within this man, and the Lord had accomplished His purpose, He came to him and gently said - "John." John had heard this voice before. "Can it be my Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I have a message for you. It is not only for you but for the Church as well. It will be projected down through thousands of years. Let me bring this forth through you."

John's heart was already broken, so just the call of his name was like a balm, and he understood. "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the Kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet" Rev

1:9-10.

Have you ever been "in the Spirit?" We know we are to walk in the Spirit, but have we experienced what it is to be caught up in the intimate movings of God? How marvelous it is when we find that "I have come back to my real habitation." This "being in the Spirit" is the place for which we were created. God gave John a vision, and in it He covered every element of the earthly realm: the world, all creation, the skies, moon, stars, animals, trees, people, cities, nations, floods, winds, thunder, lightening. God used every tangible thing that John had ever known to make a most complicated, yet marvelous display. God has thundered in Revelation. But, did you hear John thunder in Revelation? No, all that was gone.

What is the difference now? God is thundering through John. God did not call John because he could thunder. He did not want John's thunder. He wanted John's capacity for thunder, so that He could thunder through him. A marvelous change has taken place within his spirit. When John came back from the Isle of Patmos, we read, "Little children, let us love one another." There is a tenderness, a brokenness, and a graciousness that was not evident when John thundered.

So it is with our development. We have this capacity for thunder within us, and He will let us move along for awhile in our own thunder. But someday God will come after us and say, "I am going to dry up your thunder." He will put us on an "Isle of Patmos" and everyone will wonder what in the world is wrong with us. Do not return such a one to shore! He is bringing forth a disciplined spirit within this one.

When the Lord begins to deal with us to accomplish within us His purposes, let us not be fearful, for He has not given us a spirit of fear. He has a purpose in view for us, both in time, and in the ages to come. We are safe and secure in the hands of the living God.

"He who hath begun a good work in you will also finish it" (Phil 1:6).

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