

Associational Sermon.

SPIRITUAL POWER.

A Sermon preached, by appointment, before the N. S. Eastern Baptist Association, at Onslow, on Monday, July 5th, 1869.

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"I ut ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you." Acts i. 8.

(Concluded.)

II. *The power required is spiritual power.* The Saviour said to His disciples, as He beheld all of the labor, suffering and conflict that awaited them, "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you." The direct fulfillment of this prediction occurred shortly after, when on the day of Pentecost, "suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind and it filled all the house where they were sitting, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." From that day forth they were clothed with a new and Divine power by which they were fully qualified to enter on their mission. Inspired by this supernatural influence, impelled by the energy of the Holy Spirit, they rose up as the heralds of salvation, and went forth fearlessly to make known Christ to all men. And how grand was the result! Nothing could successfully withstand the steady unseem power which attended their efforts. One of the greatest miracles of history is the propagation of the Christian religion during the first century. Going forth from Jerusalem it rapidly overspread Palestine, Syria, and Asia Minor, and then crossed to Europe where Macedonia, Greece, and Italy were successively brought under its influence. When the Apostles commenced their labors in Thessalonica they were spoken of as those who had "turned the world upside down." The explanation of this remarkable success is found in the Saviour's promise, "Ye shall receive power &c."

Let us now inquire more particularly into the nature of this power and how it is realized by the people of God.

The descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was accompanied by miraculous manifestations which have not since been experienced. But although these manifestations did not continue it is evident that the blessing which they accompanied was designed for all ages. When Peter directed the conscience-stricken multitude to repent and be baptized he added the assurance that they should receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and declared that the same promise applied to all that the Lord should call. And when relating to His brethren the conversion of Cornelius and his friends the same Apostle says, "The Holy Spirit fell on them as on us at the beginning." Throughout the Apostolic Epistles we are taught that the Spirit dwells with true believers, sanctifying, strengthening, and guiding them, and that it is the duty and privilege of His children to seek for the constant presence of that Spirit. Paul says "As many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the sons of God;" and again "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" We must believe then that God the Holy Spirit literally holds intercourse with the souls of His people, and imparts to them heavenly influences. Far be the day brethren when we shall cease to believe in the personal, actual presence of the Spirit in the hearts of Christ's disciples, or when we shall cease to insist on it as an indispensable part of religion.

Spiritual power is supernatural. Man cannot originate it, he can but receive it and use it. Only upon this hypothesis can we account for that quickening influence which is at times experienced by the church. How often in the assembly of the saints while the word of the Lord was proclaimed, or the church was engaged in supplication has a sudden, irresistible influence fallen upon all, melting hard hearts, bringing tears from eyes unaccustomed to weep for sin, causing sinners to tremble in view of an impending doom, and Christians to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Infidelity may attribute these things to sympathy, animal magnetism, or any other natural cause, and frequently there may be much that is not genuine, but can those who have experienced such things, and whose hearts have thrilled with the Holy ecstasy admit such interpretations? "Is not the Lord in Zion, is not her king in her?"

But if it be asked, how does the presence of the Holy Spirit confer power upon the Christian, we answer it gives *knowledge*. Without it the Apostles might have gone forth very anxious to do their Master's work, but ignorant of the way of doing it. But being enlightened by the Spirit of God they were endowed with an understanding which nothing else could give, and were

prepared to labor intelligently for the great object before them. Their knowledge of the human heart and the best way of reaching it was doubtless increased. They received also an insight into eternal things which enabled them to feel their reality. There is a religious knowledge which the most profound study can never give, and which is possessed by those alone upon whom the Holy Spirit has descended. Divine truths may be known superficially by study, but their depth and power can never be realized except under the enlightening influence of the Spirit. And unless a truth is understood and felt it cannot be used with power. The Lord Jesus promised that the Spirit should lead the disciples into all truth, and that He should teach them all things and bring all things to their remembrance whatsoever He had said unto them. Thus the great truths of the Gospel took possession of their souls, and stood out clear and strong before their minds, and by those truths they were enabled to accomplish so much in the cause of Christ. Brethren, if we would preach with power we must understand what we preach, if we expect to see others feel the force of truth we must feel it ourselves. The subject must appear to our minds in such a vivid light that we shall be filled with interest in it. It must appear so great as to thrill and inspire us by its mighty influence. Such views of truth can only be obtained by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. A remarkable intellect may take a truth which is very vaguely perceived, and so clothe it in a gorgeous array of words; that it may dazzle and charm, but only when truth is clearly seen and deeply felt can we expect it to exert a deep and lasting effect upon the souls of men. "Knowledge is power;" and we are dependent on the Holy Spirit for a knowledge of spiritual and eternal things.

Again, the presence of God the Holy Spirit in the Christian's heart creates *enthusiasm*, or warmth of feeling, and thereby gives power. This feeling, whether it be inspired by right or wrong motives is an element of power. A man is ill prepared for the accomplishment of that in which he does not feel interested. The statesman who, when important objects are struggling with opposition does not become warmed up with a lively interest is but a small power in the political world. The general who can listlessly gaze upon his army's operations when the freedom or honor of his country are involved in the result is not fit for his country's service. If his heart does not glow with the fire of enthusiasm, and thrill with a great purpose he is weak, though surrounded by thousands of warriors. How often have order and enthusiasm given victory to the weak! And are deep emotion and intensity of feeling less required in those efforts which have for their object the salvation of immortal beings? That is likely to be a powerless sermon who comes from a drowsy mind and cold heart. But not only in preaching is fervor required, but in the discharge all Christian duties. We need the enthusiasm of the statesman, the emotion of the patriot, but we need more. We want "the sacred fire from God's own altar brought." And that cannot be obtained except by the coming of the Holy Spirit. There may be strange fire, but the genuine flame cannot be kindled by the most profound knowledge and the highest motives of this world without the Spirit's influence. Although we would not make religion consist in feeling but rather in principle yet a religion without feeling is lifeless. There is doubtless much that is simply fanaticism, but where the Holy Spirit dwells there will be the glow of Holy joy, and a burning love to Christ and the souls of men. It is by kindling in the hearts of God's people a flame of heavenly love that the Spirit imparts power to them.

Other kinds of power have been much coveted and highly prized during the history of Christianity, and have often been relied upon more than that of the omnipotent Spirit. And yet what have all such forces without His mighty influence ever accomplished? They may have secured man's objects, and effected the changes he desires, but they have not done the work of God. They may have furthered the ends of this or that sect but not the salvation of souls. When the powerful influences of this world, are sanctified and guided by the all-wise, all-powerful Spirit there and there alone are they really desirable in the church. Worldly influence, the might of arms, and the power of wealth and nobility are the idols before which many branches of the so-called church have bowed down offering a full submission in return for their assistance. And we may with reason ask where is the religious body that has not at times coveted more or less the influence of the great and the wealthy while neglecting that source of everlasting strength, which is infinitely more important to the church of Christ than the favor and influence of all the crowned heads and titled personages of earth, and all the vast treasures that the world possesses. "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord of Hosts."

The power of intellectual talents and high mental culture is another that may be too highly exalted in the church, by paying greater regard to it than to spirituality of mind. It is doubtless one of the inestimable gifts that the Head of the church has bestowed upon her, and when moulded and directed by the Holy Spirit is made effectual in extending the Redeemer's kingdom and glory; but let us ever place it secondary to spiritual power. There are religious communities possessing all these mighty worldly resources, and yet accomplishing little or nothing of that work which the Lord has committed to His church, and containing within them the elements of weakness and final decay. But that band of Christ's disciples that is thoroughly imbued and inspired by the Divine Spirit, and guided continually by His heavenly wisdom, even though destitute of worldly might, will march on to a glorious destiny breaking forth on the right hand and on the left.

One of the principal ways in which this power

assert itself among the people of God will be in an *increase of piety*. This is absolutely indispensable in the church. The venerable author of the recently published "Baptist History" speaks thus of the Baptists in Switzerland, "The appeal to Scripture on behalf of their sentiments was rendered more forcible by the innocency of their lives." That is what we need brethren. As Baptists we appeal to the word of God as our only rule of faith and practice. This is the only safe position that the church of Christ can take; one that has always been held by those whom we feel it an honor to succeed, and one that is destined to bring back many to primitive Christianity. But we are prepared to assert this principle and claim for it the adherence of our fellow men only as our lives and deportment correspond with our high profession. Scripturalness in church matters will not make up for the want of it in our conduct. The principle of Scripture versus Tradition will carry power and conviction with it just in proportion to its connection with holiness of life. What a sad discrepancy when one is seen whose constant theme is Scripturalness in everything ecclesiastical, but who seems to ignore it in his every day life. The above quoted author says "Orthodoxy is necessary, and order is necessary, but neither orthodoxy nor order will insure prosperity without a living likeness to Christ." Who can measure the power of a godly life? Piety exerts a mighty influence, which cannot be supplied by anything else, and piety is the direct and invariable result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Scripturalness in doctrine and church practice is an element of mighty power—holiness of life is one perhaps even mightier, and when both these are combined the church of God answers to Solomon's description, "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

The Denomination which possesses most spiritual power combined with fidelity to Christ will wield the greatest influence and reap the largest harvest. The Saviour has provided this never failing source of strength, and He will honor those who avail themselves of it, and have it in active operation.

This power will be experienced by the *Ministry*. How often is the servant of Christ led to feel that he is powerless! He brings to bear all the force of argument that he possesses and employs his most earnest persuasive efforts, and still finds that scarcely any impression is made. The hearers remain unmoved. They may listen attentively and respectfully, and perhaps manifest by their manner that they admire his efforts—but apparently no lasting effect is produced. The gay and thoughtless sinner is not wounded. The arrows seem to lose their sharpness, or fall short of the mark; Christians are not aroused, and the preaching of God's own word seems ineffectual. But let the minister of Christ speak under the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit and his words will come with life and force, burning their way through coldness and lethargy to the very hearts of the hearers. One may combine natural abilities, stores of learning, and the arts of rhetoric and yet have but little power; but he, whose heart throbs with holy ardor, and whose mind glows with the light of the Divine Spirit will carry power in his eye, in the tone of his voice, and in all his efforts for good. If we inquire for the secret of Peter's preaching power on the day of Pentecost, we find it in the words "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." Talents are desirable—education is important—but spiritual power is indispensable. And not only is it necessary in the public proclamation of the word, but in the discharge of the manifold duties devolving upon the ambassador of Christ. How frequently he feels when attempting to speak to persons in private concerning their religious state that his words are cold and unattractive, and carry no conviction with them, and that it is no wonder people think his communications irksome. But when the Spirit of God speaks through His servant, how quickly the words bring tears from the eyes of those with whom he pleads. When he can approach them with a heart yearning for their conversion, and with intense earnestness intreat them to be reconciled to God then must the heart be hard indeed that can coldly neglect the appeal. The Holy Spirit alone can thus qualify us for the work. If we call to mind those who have been most successful in the ministry, that is in winning souls to Christ and feeding the church of God—we will find that as a rule they have been the most spiritual and pious men.

To obtain this power is the duty of every child of God. Let us rejoice in the midst of our weakness that such a gift may be obtained. In the first place we must realize the absolute necessity for it. The salvation of souls—the spiritual welfare of the church and the glory of our Redeemer, as far as human agency is concerned depend on it. We must regard it as an essential—something that we are not to underrate or neglect. Again, let us ask for it believing that the Saviour is pleased to bestow it upon His people, and remembering that He has spoken of this as the blessing which the Father is especially ready to grant to all that ask. The special means that seem to have been employed by the disciples in order to obtain this blessing was *united prayer*. Although it was the fulfilment of the Saviour's promise, yet according to the Divine plan, it was the answer to the united supplication of the saints. Let us ever prize highly those seasons known as revivals, and seek for their more frequent occurrence. A genuine revival is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and generally comes in answer to the earnest, faithful, united prayers of God's people. But let us beware of offering all our prayers in public. The soul must be brought into communion with the Lord and in the stillness of the closet we open our hearts to receive the gracious influence from above.

Finally, let us be glad that "salvation is of the Lord." A complete redemption for all the

chosen seed has been provided by Him—the power by which the Church is to be instrumental in calling them home is supplied by Him—and salvation's work from first to last is the fruit of His eternal love and grace.

Brethren, let us arise, and lay hold of the omnipotent arm of Jehovah, extended toward us. Grasping that, and clinging to it by faith we shall be strong. Then will we not faint in the day of toil and trial—nor tremble before the giant foes of God and His church—nor doubt the power of Divine grace to make the desert "rejoice and blossom as the rose." Then will our churches shine with heavenly lustre, and such as are saved will be constantly added unto them—the weak shall become strong—error shall fall vanquished—and souls shall be saved. And when we reach the heavenly courts, all the glory shall be ascribed to the Great Redeemer forever and ever. Amen.

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

ELDER DONALD CRAWFORD ON BAPTISM, &c.

Part I.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

Dear Brother,—

Mr. Crawford has now replied to my communication as published in your columns last December. He professes, that he "has nothing new to offer" on the subject of baptism. I am sorry for this. Some had hoped, that he had greatly modified certain of his peculiar views here, if he had not wholly abandoned them. But he now restates and reargues his old baptismal fallacies. Permit me now to remark upon these, as well as upon some other matters contained in his recent communications.

2. MR. CRAWFORD'S BAPTISMAL VIEWS.

Mr. Crawford makes some statements about the way of salvation which should seem to harmonize with New Testament representations. Thus he professes his belief, "that there is salvation only in the death of Jesus—that his blood cleanseth from all sin." He farther avows his conviction, that we "come to the 'death' of Christ, 'or receive his salvation, by faith.'" But then he uses this language, (in the citation of which I am responsible for the marks of emphasis:—"Jesus requires the man who would be saved to believe in him with all his heart. Does he require the same man to be baptized also, for the same end;—i. e. to be saved? I BELIEVE HE DOES." This is explicit enough—woefully explicit.

3. A COMPARISON.

And now Mr. Crawford must not be offended with me for saying, that his utterances here strongly remind me of some others which, not long ago, were placed before our Island public. They occur in a sermon delivered in this city, in the summer of 1867, by the Rev. G. W. Hodgson, now minister of St. Peter's Church, recently opened among us. "CHRIST IN YOU," taken from Col. i. 27, is the text and subject of that sermon. It contains a large amount of evangelical truth, well and vigorously expressed. But alas! for the "dead flies" in this pot of "ointment!" Mr. Hodgson indulges in such expressions as these, (in quoting which I am responsible for the Italics.) "Thus far we have come—Christ died; rose; went up to Heaven; founded a Church to be His Body, in which He should dwell; has brought us (whoever and whatever we are) by *Baptism* into that Holy Catholic Church: we are *therefore* members of His Body" Again: "made, by *Baptism*, members of Christ's body, in which He dwells—is Christ in us." Again, the preacher speaks of "the two Sacraments, the Water and the Blood, Which, with the Spirit, are 'the Three that have record on earth' to the abiding presence of Jesus in His Church." And yet once more—"God provides us with something outside of ourselves on which we may rest. First of all, His own Love; then the Death of Christ; ourselves given an interest in that Death when we are brought into Christ's Church, of which our *Baptism* is at once the means and the pledge; then Christ's abiding presence in His Church, and His conveying Himself to us, of which the other great Sacrament is the pledge and the means." What is all this but the doctrine of sacramental efficiency, which has of late years become so fashionable in certain quarters? And it is by these expressions that the author of this sermon has tainted and poisoned, as with the poison of Rome, an otherwise unexceptionable exhibition of the meaning of the phrase, "Christ in you."

Now I do not mean to say absolutely, that Mr. Crawford has gone to the same lengths as Mr. Hodgson. And yet,—he will pardon the expression, which I use in sorrow, and not in anger or contempt,—there is a certain tincture of what may be styled *Baptist Puseyism* in his language