

The Spirit of Comfort

by A.B. Simpson

The Holy Spirit is the author of peace, joy, and comfort, and He helps us to co-operate with Him in our spiritual growth and development.

Scripture: Isaiah 26:3, Matthew 11:28, John 14:27, John 15:11, Acts 9:31, Romans 5:1, 2 Corinthians 1:5, Galatians 5:22-23, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Hebrews 4:11

Topics: "Comfort", "Joy in Trials"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter, who brings peace, joy, and consolation to believers. He explains that true peace comes from a deep relationship with God, while joy is a divine gift that transcends circumstances. Simpson encourages believers to cooperate with the Holy Spirit, especially during trials, as these moments can lead to profound joy and spiritual growth. He highlights that comfort is proportional to trial, and that the Holy Spirit's presence is essential for enduring life's challenges. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a faith that seeks to glorify God above all, leading to lasting joy and fulfillment.

Transcript

"Walking in the comfort of the Holy Ghost." Acts ix 31

Our English translators have given to the Greek work Paraclete, which the Lord Jesus applied to the Holy Ghost, the translation of the Comforter. And while this term is not expressive of the complete sense of the original, yet it expresses very beautifully one of the most blessed character and offices of the Holy Spirit.

I.

He is the author of peace. It is twofold peace, peace with God and the peace of God. We find many references to this twofold rest. "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." This is the rest which the troubled soul receives when it comes to Christ for pardon. But then there is a deeper rest: "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me who am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." This is experienced after the surrender of the will to God, and the discipline of the Spirit fully received. So again the prophet Isaiah announces, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee."

There is a deeper peace, so we find the risen Saviour meeting the disciples in the upper room with the salutation, "Peace be unto you," as He shows them His hands and His side; but later, He breathes on them and adds a second benediction of peace as they receive the Holy Ghost. Peace with God is the effect of forgiveness, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the gift of the Holy Spirit as He seals upon the heart the assurance of God's pardoning work, and breathes the witness of acceptance. And yet this is dependent upon our believing and resting in the promise. We must co-operate with the Holy Spirit. He witnesses with our spirit, not to our spirit, that we are the children of God. "In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." "The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that ye may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost." Thus we see that we must co-operate in believing.

The peace of God is a deeper experience; it comes from the indwelling of God Himself in the heart that has been surrendered wholly to Him, and it is nothing less than the very heart of Christ resting in our heart, possessing our Spirit, and imparting to us the very same peace which He manifested even in that awful hour when all others were filled with dismay, but He was calm and victorious, even in the prospect of the garden and the cross. It is the deep, tranquil, eternal rest of God, taking the place of the restless, troubled sea of our own thoughts, fears and agitations. It is the very peace of God, and it passeth all understanding, and keeps the heart and mind through Christ Jesus our Lord. It is the special gift of the Holy Ghost; nay, it is rather His own personal abiding, as the Dove of Rest, spreading His tranquil wings over the troubled sea of human strife and passion, and bringing His own everlasting rest.

Have we entered into His rest, and are we walking with Him in the secret place of the Most High? What gift is more necessary and delightful in this world of disquiet and change? What would the world not give for an opiate that could charm away its cares and fears, and lull its heart to such divine repose; and yet from the Paraclete of love, and the brooding wing of the holy Dove, men refuse the gift for which their hearts are breaking, and their lives are wearing out in the fret and friction of strife and sin. This is the true element of spiritual growth and power. "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength," is the mission of the very Comforter to bring. "Let us, therefore, fear lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you would seem to come short of it. Let us labor, therefore, to enter into this rest lest any of you should fail after the same example of unbelief."

II.

The Spirit of Joy.

This is a deeper and fuller spring, but the source is the same, the bosom of the Comforter. The kingdom of God, we are told, is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. This also is the joy of Christ Himself. It is the Spirit's business to take the things that are Christ's and reveal them to us. And so the Master has said, "These things have I said unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask and ye shall receive that your joy may be full." We have some conception of His joy. Even in the dark and dreadful hour when the powers of darkness were gathering about Him for the final struggle, and even His Father's face was about to be covered with the awful cloud of desertion and judgment, still he could rise superior to His surroundings and so forget His own troubles as to think only of His disciples and say to them, "Let not your heart be troubled."

Like the martyrs, afterwards, at the stake and amid the flames, who testified that so deep was their inward joy that they were unconscious of external agony, so He was transported above His anguish by the very joy of His Father's presence and love. It was this that enabled Him to endure, "for the joy set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame." He saw not the deep, dark valley of humiliation, but the heights of resurrection-life and ascension-glory just beyond; and He was lifted above the consciousness of the present by the vision of hope, and the joy of the Lord. This is the joy He will give to us. It is nothing less than the fullness of His own heart throbbing in our breast and sharing with us His own immutable blessedness.

Therefore, this joy is wholly independent of surrounding circumstances of natural temperament. It is not a spirit of native cheerfulness, but it is a perennial fountain of divine gladness, springing up from sources that lie far below the soil of human nature. It is the same anointing of which the prophet said of Christ Himself, "Thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

Now this divine joy is the privilege of all consecrated believers. We need it for victory in the trying places of life. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." Satan always takes special advantage of a depressed and discouraged heart. Victory must be won in the conflict by a spirit of gladness and praise. The hosts of God must march into the battle with songs of rejoicing. The world must see the light of heaven in our faces if it would believe in the reality of our religion.

Therefore, we find the Scriptures exhorting us to "rejoice in the Lord always, and in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us." But the secret of such a love must be a heart possessed and overflowing with the Holy Ghost. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy and peace." We cannot find these springs in the soil of time, they flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb. But a soul that dwells in the innermost shrine of the Master's presence will ever know it and reflect it. It can no more be concealed than the sunshine of heaven, and it will light up the humblest life and the most trying situation, just as the sun itself lights up the lowly cabin, and shines through the dark vault, if only it can find an opening where it may enter in. Are you walking in the light of the Lord and filled with His joy? And can we sing:

God is the treasure of my soul,

A source of lasting joy;

A joy which want cannot impair

Nor death itself destroy?

III.

The Spirit of Comfort and Consolation.

It is especially in the hour of distress and trial that the Comforter becomes manifest in His peculiar ministry of consolation and love. It is then that the promise is fulfilled which applies more especially to this person of the Godhead as the very Mother of the soul. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem."

1. Comfort implies the existence of trial; and the happiest life is not the one freest from affliction, but they who walk in the Spirit will always be found familiar with the paths of sorrow and the adverse circumstances

of life. Nowhere are the followers of the Man of Sorrows promised exemption from the fellowship of His sufferings, but every element of blessing they possess carries with it an added source of trial. To them the world is less a home than to its own children, and their dearest friends are the readiest to misunderstand their lives and cross their wishes. To them comes the experience of temptation and spiritual conflict, as it does not come to the worldling and the sinner, and they have often cause to feel and know

"The path of sorrow and that path alone,

Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown.

No traveler ever reached that blessed abode,

Who found not thorns and briars in the road."

But all these are but occasions to prove the love and faithfulness of God. The storm cloud is but the background for the rainbow, and the falling tear but an occasion for the gentle hand of the Comforter to wipe it away.

2. The comfort is in proportion to the trial. There is a blessed equilibrium of joy and sorrow. As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds in Christ. As far as the pendulum swings backward, so far it swings forward. Every trial is, therefore, a prophecy of blessing to the heart that walks with Jesus. A dear saint of God once remarked, near the close of life, "God has seemed all my life to be so sorry for the trials He gave me in the beginning, that He has been trying to make up for it ever since." This is a blessed compensation even here, and by-and-by we shall find that "our light affliction, which was but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory."

3. Times of trial are, therefore, often our times of greatest joy. God's nightingales sing at midnight, and

Sorrow touched by God grows bright

With more than rapturous ray,

As darkness shows us worlds of light

We never saw by day.

It was when the apostles were turned out of Antioch by a mob of respectable men and honorable women, that the record was added, "The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost." It was when the fig-tree refused to blossom, and the vines were stripped of their accustomed fruit, and nature was robed in a winding sheet of death, that Habakkuk's song rose to its highest notes of triumph, and he could say "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and glory in the God of my salvation." There is such a thing as "sorrowful yet always rejoicing;" a bitter sweet which draws its quintessence of joy from the very wormwood and the gall, and which knows not whether to weep or sing as it cries, with Pascal, in the one breath "joy upon joy, tears upon tears !"

Oh! it is a blessed testimony to the grace of God and the Spirit's abundant love, when we can rise above our circumstances and "count it all joy, even when we fall into divers temptations," and "rejoice, inasmuch as we are partakers of the sufferings of Christ, because when His glory shall be revealed we shall be glad with exceeding joy."

4. If we would know the full comfort of the Holy Spirit we must co-operate with Him, and rejoice by simple faith, often when our circumstances are all forbidding, and even our very feelings give no response of sympathy or conscious joy. It is a great thing to learn to count it all joy. Counting is not the language of poetry or sentiment, but of cold, unerring calculation. It adds up the column thus: sorrow, temptation, difficulty, opposition, depression, desertion, danger, discouragement on every side, but at the bottom of the column God's presence, God's will, God's joy, God's promise, God's recompense. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory." How much does the column amount to? Lo! the sum of all the addition is "ALL JOY," for "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed."

That is the way to count your joy. Singly, a given circumstance may not seem joyful, but counted in with God, and His presence and promise, it makes a glorious sum in the arithmetic of faith. We can rejoice in the Lord as an act of will, and when we do, the Comforter will soon bring all our emotions into line, yea, and all our circumstances too. They who went into battle with songs of praise in front soon had songs of praise in the rear, and an abundant, visible cause of thanksgiving. Therefore, let us say with the apostle, "I do rejoice, yea, and I will rejoice."

5. The Holy Spirit's joys and consolations are administered to the heart in His infinite and sovereign wisdom, according to His purpose, for our spiritual training, and with reference to our spiritual state, or our immediate needs and prospects. Frequently, He sends His sweetest whispers as the reward of special obedience in some difficult and trying place. Not only at the judgment, but now also does the Master say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of thy Lord." That joy is experienced here, and the good and faithful servant has the recompense of special service and obedience in the place of difficulty and testing.

Sometimes, again, the Spirit's comforts are sent to prepare us for some impending hour of trial, that when the storm bursts upon us we may remember the Master's love, and be cheered and sustained through the trying hour, even as the Holy Spirit came on Jordan's banks, and the Father's voice just before the forty days of dark, fierce temptation. Sometimes, again, the Spirit's love-tokens come just after some dark and terrible conflict, even as the angels appeared after Gethsemane to comfort our weary and suffering Lord. Sometimes, also, His comforts are withdrawn to keep us from leaning too strongly on sensible joys, and to discipline us in the life of simple faith, and teach us to trust when we cannot see the face of our Beloved, or hear the music of His voice.

6. But we must ever remember, in connection with our varied experiences, that even comfort and joy are not to be the aim and goal of our hearts, but rather that the principle of our Christian life is simple faith, and the purpose, faithful obedience and service to our Master.

"Not enjoyment and not sorrow

Is our destined end and way;

But to act that each tomorrow

Finds us farther than today."

The life that is naturally influenced by sunshine or shadow will be ephemeral, and change its hue like the chameleon, with the seasons and surroundings. Indeed, the very source of lasting joy is to ignore our own

emotions and feelings and act uniformly on the twin principles of faith and duty. Many people are trying to get joyful emotions just as they would buy cut flowers in winter. They are bright and fragrant for a few hours, but they have no root, and they wither away with the sunset. Far better and wiser to plant the root in the fertile ground, to water it, and to wait for it, and in a little while the lasting blossoms will open their petals and breathe out their fragrance on the air. So the joy that springs from trust and permanent spiritual life is abiding as its source.

Let us, therefore, learn to ignore the immediate impressions that lie upon the surface of our consciousness, and steadfastly walk in the fellowship and will of the Divine Spirit, and thus there shall grow in our hearts and lives the roots of happiness and all their blessed fruits of joy and consolation. Often, therefore, has God to withdraw, for a time, the conscious joy, that He may prove us and develop in us the faith that trusts Him, and loves Him for Himself, rather than for the sweetest of His gifts.

A dear friend once came to us complaining that her spiritual joy had all left her, and that her heart was like a stone. There seemed no disobedience in her life, and no defect in her faith, and we could only commit her to the Master for all the teaching she might need. A few days afterwards she came with radiant countenance to tell how it had all ended. "The darkness," she said, "continued until I told the Lord that if He wanted me to be willing to trust Him in the dark, and to bear this for Him, I would do so as long as He was pleased to continue it. The moment I had yielded my will and accepted His, the dawn of heaven burst upon my soul, and the light returned with more than its former gladness, and I knew that He had only been testing me to teach me to trust Him for His own dear sake, and to walk by faith and not by sight."

Thus, let us delight ourselves in the Lord, and He will give us the desires of our heart. Let us aim supremely to please and glorify Him, and we shall find that "to glorify God" is "to enjoy Him forever." Let us rise above even the joy of the Lord to the Lord Himself, and having Him, it shall be forever true of us, "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy, no man taketh from you." "My joy shall remain in you and your joy shall be full." "Thy sun shall no more go down, nor thy moon withdraw its shining, for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and thy days of mourning shall be ended."

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