

'Having Begun in the Spirit '

by Andrew Murray

The Church of Christ must return to living under the power of the Holy Spirit in order to be restored to its former spiritual power.

Scripture: Galatians 3:2

Topics: "Spiritual Empowerment", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Andrew Murray emphasizes the necessity of living in the power of the Holy Spirit, warning against the tendency of believers to rely on their own efforts after beginning their spiritual journey in the Spirit. He highlights the feebleness and failures within the Church, attributing them to a reliance on human strength rather than divine empowerment. Murray calls for a return to acknowledging the Holy Spirit as the source of strength and guidance, urging believers to yield themselves to the Spirit for true spiritual growth. He stresses that without the Holy Spirit, Christians cannot live a life that is pleasing to God, and he encourages a deep confession of reliance on the flesh. Ultimately, he offers hope that through surrender to the Holy Spirit, believers can experience restoration and empowerment in their spiritual lives.

Transcript

The words from which I wish to address you, you will find in the epistle to the Galatians, the third chapter, the second and third verses: "This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"

Are ye so foolish?" And then comes my text-"Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?"

When we speak of the quickening or the deepening or the strengthening of the spiritual life, we are thinking of something that is feeble and wrong and sinful. It is a great thing to take our place before God with the confession: "Oh, God, our spiritual life is not what it should be!" May God work that in your heart, reader.

As we look around at the Church, we see so many indications of feebleness, failure, sin, and shortcoming. They compel us to ask: Why is it? Is there any necessity for the Church of Christ to be living in such a low state? Or is it actually possible that God's people should be living always in the joy and strength of their God?

Every believing heart must answer: It is possible.

Then comes the great question: Why is it, how is it to be accounted for, that God's Church as a whole is so feeble, and that the great majority of Christians are not living up to their privileges? There must be a reason for it. Has God not given Christ His Almighty Son to be the Keeper of every believer, to make Christ an ever-present reality, and to impart and communicate to us all that we have in Christ? God has given His Son, and God has given His Spirit. How is it that believers do not live up to their privileges?

In more than one of the epistles, we find a very solemn answer to that question. There are epistles, such as the first to the Thessalonians, where Paul writes to the Christians, in effect: "I want you to grow, to abound, to increase more and more." They were young, and there were things lacking in their faith. But their state was so far satisfactory, gave him such great joy, that he writes time after time: "I pray God that you may abound more and more; I write to you to increase more and more" (1 Thessalonians 4: 1,10). But there are other epistles where he takes a very different tone, especially the epistle to the Corinthians and to the Galatians, and he tells them in many different ways what the one reason was that they were .not living as Christians ought to live. Many were under the power of the flesh. My text is one example. He reminds them that by the preaching of faith they had received the Holy Spirit. He had preached Christ to them; they had accepted that Christ and had received the Holy Spirit in power.

But what happened? Having begun in the Spirit, they tried to perfect the work that the Spirit had begun in the flesh by their own effort. We find the same teaching in the epistle to the Corinthians.

Now, we have here a solemn discovery of what the great need is in the Church of Christ. God has called the Church of Christ to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. But the Church is living, .for the most part, in the power of human flesh, and of will and energy and effort apart from the Spirit of God. I do not doubt that this is the case with many individual believers. And oh, if God will use me to give you a message from Him, my one message will be this: "If the Church will return to acknowledge that the Holy Spirit is her strength and her help, and if the Church will return to give up everything, and wait on God to be filled with the Spirit, her days of beauty and gladness will return. We will see the glory of God revealed among us." This is my message to every individual believer: "Nothing will help you unless you come to understand that you must live every day under the power of the Holy Spirit." God wants you to be a living vessel in whom the power of the Spirit is to be manifested every hour and every moment of your life. God will enable you to be that.

Now, let us try to learn what this word to the Galatians teaches us-some very simple thoughts. It shows us how (1) the beginning of the Christian life is receiving the Holy Spirit. It shows us (2) what great danger there is of forgetting that we are to live know what it is, since that time, to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us try to take hold of this great truth: The beginning of the true Christian life is to receive the Holy Spirit. And the work of every Christian minister is that which was the work of Paul-to remind his people that they received the Holy Spirit, and must live according to His guidance and in His power.

If those Galatians who received the Holy Spirit in power were tempted to go astray by that terrible danger of perfecting in the flesh what had been begun in the Spirit, how much more danger do those Christians run who hardly ever know that they have received the Holy Spirit. How much more danger is there for those who, if they know it as a matter of belief, hardly ever think of the gift of the Holy Spirit, and hardly ever praise God for it!

NEGLECTING THE HOLY SPIRIT

But now look, in the second place, at the great danger.

You may all know what shunting is on a railway. A locomotive with its train may be traveling in a certain direction, and the points at some place may not be properly opened or closed, and unobservingly it is shunted off to the right or to the left. And if that takes place, for instance, on a dark night, the train goes in the wrong direction, and the people might never know it until they have gone some distance.

And just so, God gives Christians the Holy Spirit with this intention-that every day, all their life, should be lived in the power of the Spirit. A man cannot live one hour of a godly life unless by the power of the Holy Spirit. He may live a proper, consistent life, as people call it, an irreproachable life, a life of virtue and diligent service. But to live a life acceptable to God, in the enjoyment of God's salvation and God's love, to live and walk in the power of the new life-he cannot do it unless he is guided by the Holy Spirit every day and every hour.

But now listen to the danger. The Galatians received the Holy Spirit, but what was begun by the Spirit they tried to perfect in the flesh. How? They fell back again under Judaizing teachers who told them they must be circumcised. They began to seek their religion in external observances. And so Paul uses that expression about those teachers who had them circumcised so "that they may glorify in your flesh" (Galatians 6:13).

You sometimes hear the expression used, religious flesh. What is meant by that? It is simply an expression made to give utterance to these thoughts: My human nature and my human will and my human effort can be very active in religion. After being converted, and after receiving the Holy Spirit, I may begin in my own strength to try to serve God.

I may be very diligent and doing a great deal, and yet all the time it is more the work of human flesh than of God's Spirit. What a solemn thought, that man can, without noticing, be shunted off from the line of the Holy Spirit onto the line of the flesh.

How solemn it is that man can be most diligent and make great sacrifices, and yet it is all in the power of the human will! Ah, the great question for us to ask of God in self-examination is that we may be shown whether our Christian life is lived more in the power of the flesh than in the power of the Holy Spirit. A man may be a preacher, he may work most diligently in his ministry, a man may be a Christian worker, and others may say of him that he makes great sacrifices, and yet you can feel there is something lacking. You feel that he is not a spiritual man; there is no spirituality about his life. How many Christians there are about whom no one would ever think of saying: "What a spiritual man he is!" Ah! there is the weakness of the Church of Christ. It is all in that one word-flesh.

Now, the flesh may manifest itself in many ways. It may be manifested in fleshly wisdom. My mind may be most active about Christianity. I may preach or write or think or meditate, and delight in being occupied with things in God's Book and in God's Kingdom. Yet, the power of the Holy Spirit may be markedly absent. I fear that if you take the preaching throughout the Church of Christ and ask why there is so little converting power in the preaching of the Word, why there is so much work and often so little result for eternity, why the Word has so little power to build up believers in holiness and in consecration-the answer will be: It is the absence of the power of the Holy Spirit. And why is this? There can be no other reason except that the flesh and human energy have taken the place that the Holy Spirit ought to have. That was true of the Galatians; it was true of the Corinthians. You know Paul said to them: "I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual men, but as unto carnal" (1 Corinthians 3:1). And you know how often in the course of

his epistle he had to reprove and condemn them for strife and for divisions.

LACKING THE FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

A third thought: What are the proofs or indications that a church like the Galatians, or a Christian, is serving God in the power of the flesh-is perfecting in the flesh what was begun in the Spirit? The answer is very easy. Religious self effort always ends in sinful flesh. What was the state of those Galatians? They were striving to be justified by the works of the law. And yet they were quarreling and in danger of devouring one another. Count the number of expressions that the apostle uses to indicate their want of love. You will find more than twelve-envy, jealousy, bitterness, strife, and all sorts of others. Read in the fourth and fifth chapters what he says about that. You see how they tried to serve God in their own-strength, and they failed utterly. All this religious effort resulted in failure. The power of sin and the sinful flesh got the better of them. Their whole condition was one of the saddest that could be thought of.

This comes to us with unspeakable solemnity.

There is a complaint everywhere in the Christian Church of the lack of a high standard of integrity and godliness, even among the professing members of Christian churches. I remember a sermon which I heard preached on commercial morality. But let us not speak only of the commercial morality or immorality; let us go into the homes of Christians. Think of the life to which God has called His children, and which He enables them to live by the Holy Spirit. Think of how much there is of unlovingness, temper, sharpness, and bitterness. Think how often there is strife among the members of churches, and how much there is of envy, jealousy, sensitiveness, and pride. Then we are compelled to say: "Where are marks of the presence of the Spirit of the Lamb of God?" Wanting, sadly wanting!

Many people speak of these things as though they were the natural result of our feebleness and cannot be helped. Many people speak of these things as sins, yet have given up the hope of conquering them. Many people speak of these things in the church around them, and do not see the least prospect of ever having the things changed. There is no prospect until there is a radical change, until the Church of God begins to see that every sin in the believer comes from the flesh-from a fleshly life midst our Christian activities, from a striving in self-effort to serve God. We will fail until we learn to make confession, and until we begin to see that we must somehow or other get God's Spirit in power back to His Church. Where did the Church begin in Pentecost? There they began in the Spirit. But, how the Church of the next century went off into the flesh! They thought to perfect the Church in the flesh.

Do not let us think, because the blessed Reformation restored the great doctrine of justification by faith, that the power of the Holy Spirit was then fully restored. If it is our belief that God is going to have mercy on His Church in these last ages, it will be because the doctrine and the truth about the Holy Spirit will not only be studied, but sought after with a whole heart. It is not only because that truth will be sought after, but because ministers and congregations will be found bowing before God in deep abasement with one cry: "We have grieved God's Spirit. We have tried to be Christian churches with as little as possible of God's Spirit. We have not sought to be churches filled with the Holy Spirit."

All the feebleness in the Church is owing to the refusal of the Church to obey its God. And why is that so? I know your answer. You say: "We are too feeble and too helpless, and we vow to obey, but somehow we fail." Ah yes, you fail because you do not accept the strength of God. God alone can work out His will in you. You cannot work out God's will, but His Holy Spirit can. Until the Church and the believers grasp this, and cease trying by human effort to do God's will, and wait upon the Holy Spirit to come with all His

omnipotent and enabling power, the Church will never be what God wants her to be. It will never be what God is willing to make of her.

YIELDING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

I come now to my last thought, that question: What is the way to restoration?

Beloved friend, the answer is simple and easy. If that train has been shunted off, there is nothing for it to do but to come back to the point at which it was led away. The Galatians had no other way in returning but to come back to where they had gone wrong. They had to come back from all religious effort in their own strength, and from seeking anything by their own work, and to yield themselves humbly to the Holy Spirit. There is no other way for us as individuals.

Is there any brother or sister whose heart is conscious: "My life knows little of the power of the Holy Spirit"? I come to you with God's message that you can have no conception of what your life would be in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is too high, too blessed, and too wonderful. But I bring you the message that just as truly as the everlasting Son of God came to this world and did His wonderful works, that just as truly as on Calvary He died and brought about your redemption by His precious blood, so can the Holy Spirit come into your heart. With His divine power, He may sanctify you and enable you to do God's blessed will, and fill your heart with joy and strength. But, we have forgotten; we have grieved; we have dishonored the Holy Spirit; and, He has not been able to do His work. But I bring you the message: The Father in heaven loves to fill His children with His Holy Spirit. God longs to give each one individually, separately, the power of the Holy Spirit for daily life. The command comes to us individually, unitedly. God wants us as His children to arise and place our sins before Him, and to call on Him for mercy. Oh, are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you perfecting in the flesh that which was begun in the Spirit? Let us bow in shame, and confess before God how our fleshly religion, our self-effort and self-confidence, have been the cause of every failure.

I have often been asked by young Christians: "Why is it that I fail so? I did so solemnly vow with my whole heart, and did desire to serve God. Why have I failed?" To such I always give this answer: "My dear friend, you are trying to do in your own strength what Christ alone can do in you." And when they tell me: "I am sure I knew Christ alone could do it; I was not trusting in myself," my answer is: "You were trusting in yourself, or you could not have failed. If you had trusted Christ, He could not fail." Oh, this perfecting in the flesh what was begun in the Spirit runs far deeper through us than we know. Let us ask God to show us that it is only when we are brought to utter shame and emptiness that we will be prepared to receive the blessing that comes from on high.

And so I come with these two questions. Are you living, beloved brother-minister-I ask it of every minister of the Gospel-under the power of the Holy Spirit? Are you living as an anointed, Spirit-filled man in your ministry and your life before God? Oh friends, our place is an awful one. We have to show people what God will do for us, not in our words and teaching, but in our life. God help us to do it!

I ask it of every member of Christ's Church and of every believer: Are you living a life under the power of the Holy Spirit day by day? Or are you attempting to live without that? Remember, you cannot. Are you consecrated, given up to the Spirit to work in you and to live in you? Oh, come and confess every failure of temper, every failure of tongue however small. Confess every failure owing to the absence of the Holy Spirit and the presence of the power of self. Are you consecrated, are you given up to the Holy Spirit?

If your answer is no, then I come with a second question-Are you willing to be consecrated? Are you willing to give yourself up to the power of the Holy Spirit? You well know that the human side of consecration will not help you. I may consecrate myself a hundred times with all the intensity of my being, and that will not help me. What will help me is this-that God from heaven accepts and seals the consecration.

And now are you willing to give yourselves up to the Holy Spirit? You can do it now. A great deal may still be dark and dim, and beyond what we understand. You may feel nothing; but come. God alone can work the change. God alone, who gave us the Holy Spirit, can restore the Holy Spirit in power into our life. God alone can "strengthen us with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Ephesians 3:16). And to every waiting heart that will make the sacrifice, and give up everything, and give time to cry and pray to God, the answer will come. The blessing is not far off. Our God delights in helping us. He will enable us to perfect, not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, what was begun in the Spirit.

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