

Separated Unto the Holy Spirit

by Andrew Murray

The Holy Spirit is the director of the work of God upon the earth, and we must give Him the place of honor that belongs to Him in order to know His will and receive His blessing.

Scripture: Ephesians 6:12

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Angelology"

Description

In this sermon on archangels, the preacher delves into the celestial hierarchy, explaining the concept of archangels as spiritual beings of higher rank above angels. The role of Michael, the archangel, is highlighted through biblical passages, showcasing his interactions with the devil and his significance in spiritual warfare. The term 'archangel' signifies a specific rank that qualifies one for special work and service, as seen in various apocryphal literature and biblical references.

Transcript

"Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen ... and Saul. "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me -Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

"And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia" (Acts 13:1-4).

In the story of our text, we find some precious thoughts to guide us to what God would have of us, and what God would do for us. The great lesson of the verses quoted is this: The Holy Spirit is the director of the work of God upon the earth. And what we should do if we are to rightly work for God, and if God is to bless our work, is to see that we stand in a right relationship with the Holy Spirit. We must see that we give Him the place of honor that belongs to Him everyday. In all our work and (what is more) in all our Private, inner life, the Holy Spirit must always have the first place. Let me point out to you some of the precious thoughts our passage suggests.

First of all, we see that God has His own plans with regard to His Kingdom. His church at Antioch had been established. God had certain plans and intentions with regard to Asia and with regard to Europe. He had conceived them; they were His, and He made them known to His servants.

Our great Commander organizes every campaign, and His generals and officers do not always know the great plans. They often receive sealed orders, and they have to wait for Him to reveal their contents. God in heaven has wishes and a will, in regard to any work that ought to be done, and to the way in which it has to be done. Blessed is the man who receives God's secrets and works under Him.

Some years ago, at Wellington, South Africa, where I live, we opened a Mission Institute-what is counted there a fine, large building. At our opening services, the principal said something that I have never forgotten. He remarked:

"Last year we gathered here to lay the foundation stone, and what was there then to be seen? Nothing but rubbish and stones and bricks and ruins of an old building that had been pulled down. There we laid the foundation stone, and very few knew what the building was that was to rise. No one knew it perfectly in every detail except one man, the architect. In his mind it was all clear, and as the contractor and the mason and the carpenter came to do their work, they took their orders from him. The humblest laborer had to be obedient to orders. The structure rose, and this beautiful building has been completed. And just so," he added, "this building that we open today is but laying the foundation of a work of which only God knows what is to become."

But God has His workers and His plans clearly mapped out. Our position is to wait so that God may communicate to us as much of His will as is needful.

We simply have to be faithful in obedience, carrying out His orders. God has a plan for His Church on earth. But alas! we too often make our own plan. We think that we know what ought to be done. We ask God first to bless our feeble efforts, instead of absolutely refusing to go unless God goes before us. God has planned for the work and the extension of His Kingdom. The Holy Spirit has had that work given in charge to Him, "The work whereunto I have called them." May God, therefore, help us all to be afraid of touching "the ark of God" (2 Samuel 6:6), except as we are led by the Holy Spirit.

Then the second thought-God is willing and able to reveal to His servants what His will is.

Yes, blessed be God, communications still come down from heaven! As we read here what the Holy Spirit said, so the Spirit will still speak to His Church and His people. In these latter days, He has often done it. He has come to individual men, and by His divine teaching He has led them out into fields of labor that others could not at first understand or approve. He has led them into ways and methods that did not appeal to the majority. But the Holy Spirit still, in our time, teaches His people. Thank God, in our foreign missionary societies and in our home missions, and in a thousand forms of work, the guiding of the Holy Spirit is known. But (we are all ready, I think, to confess) He is too little known. We have not learned to wait upon Him enough, and so we should make a solemn declaration before God: Oh God, we want to wait more for You to show us Your will.

Do not ask God only for power. Many a Christian has his own plan of working, but God must send the power. The man works in his own will, and God must give the grace-the one reason why God often gives so little grace and so little success. But let us all take our place before God, and say:

"What is done in the will of God, the strength of God will not be withheld from it. What is done in the will of God must have the mighty blessing of God."

And so let our first desire be to have the will of God revealed.

If you ask me, Is it any easy thing to get these communications from heaven, and to understand them? I can give you the answer. It is easy to those who are in proper fellowship with heaven, and who understand the art of waiting on God in prayer. How often we ask: How can a person know the will of God? And people want, when they are in perplexity, to pray very earnestly so that God would answer them at once. But God can only reveal His will to a heart that is humble and tender and empty. God can only reveal His will in perplexities and special difficulties to a heart that has learned to obey and honor Him loyally in little things and in daily life.

That brings me to the third thought- Note the disposition to which the Spirit reveals God's will.

What do we read here? There were a number of men ministering to the Lord and fasting, and the Holy Spirit came and spoke to them. Some people understand this passage as they would in reference to a missionary committee of our day. We see there is an open field, and we have had our missions in other fields. We are going to get on to that field. We have virtually settled that, and we pray about it. But the position was a very different one in those former days. I doubt whether any of them thought of Europe (for later on even Paul himself tried to go back into Asia) until the night vision called him by the will of God. Look at those men. God had done wonders. He had extended the Church to Antioch, and He had given rich and large blessing. Now, here were these men ministering to the Lord, serving Him with prayer and fasting. What a deep conviction they have-"It must all come directly from heaven. We are in fellowship with the risen Lord; we must have a close union with Him, and somehow He will let us know what He wants." And there they were, empty, ignorant, helpless, glad, and joyful, but deeply humbled.

"O Lord," they seem to say, "we are Your servants, and in fasting and prayer we wait upon You. What is Your will for us?"

Was it not the same with Peter? He was on the housetop, fasting and praying, and little did he think of the vision and the command to go to Caesarea. He was ignorant of what his work might be.

It is in hearts entirely surrendered to the Lord Jesus, separating themselves from the world, and even from ordinary religious exercises, and giving themselves up in intense prayer to look to their Lord, that the heavenly will of God will be made manifest.

You know that word fasting occurs a second time (in the third verse): "They fasted and prayed." When you pray, you love to go into your closet, according to the command of Jesus, and shut the door. You shut out business and company and pleasure and anything that can distract, and you want to be alone with God. But in one way, even the material world follows you there. You must eat. These men wanted to shut themselves out from the influences of the material and the visible, and they fasted. What they ate was simply enough to supply the wants of nature. In the intensity of their souls, they thought to give expression to their letting go of everything on earth in their fasting before God. Oh, may God give us that intensity of desire-that separation from everything-because we want to wait upon God, that the Holy Spirit may reveal to us God's blessed will.

The fourth thought- What is now the will of God as the Holy Spirit reveals it? It is contained in one phrase: Separation unto the Holy Spirit. That is the keynote of the message from heaven.

"Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. The work is mine; and I care for it; and I have chosen these men and called them; and I want you who represent the Church of Christ upon earth to set them apart unto me."

Look at this heavenly message in its twofold aspect. The men were to be set apart to the Holy Spirit, and the Church was to do this separating work. The Holy Spirit could trust these men to do it in a right spirit. There they were abiding in fellowship with the heavenly. The Holy Spirit could say to them, "Do the work of separating these men." And these were the men the Holy Spirit had prepared, and He could say of them, "Let them be separated unto me."

Here we come to the very root-the very life of the need of Christian workers. The question is: What is needed so that the power of God would rest on us more mightily? What is needed so that the blessing of God would be poured out more abundantly among those poor, wretched people and perishing sinners among whom we labor? And the answer from heaven is:

"I want men separated unto the Holy Spirit."

What does that imply? You know that there are two spirits on earth. Christ said, when He spoke about the Holy Spirit: "The world cannot receive him" (John 14:17). Paul said: "We have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is of God" (I Corinthians 2:12). That is the great want in every worker-the spirit of the world going out, and the Spirit of God coming in to take possession of the inner life and of the whole being.

I am sure there are workers who often cry to God for the Holy Spirit to come upon them as a Spirit of power for their work. When they feel that measure of power, and receive blessing, they thank God for it. But God wants something more and something higher. God wants us to seek for the Holy Spirit as a Spirit of power in our own heart and life, to conquer self and cast out sin, and to work the blessed and beautiful image of Jesus into us.

There is a difference between the power of the Spirit as a gift and the power of the Spirit for the grace of a holy life. A man may often have a measure of the power of the Spirit, but if there is not a large measure of the Spirit as the Spirit of grace and holiness, the defect will be evident in his work. He may be made the means of conversion, but he never will help people on to a higher standard of spiritual life. When he passes away, a great deal of his work may pass away, too. But a man who is separated unto the Holy Spirit is a man who is given up to say:

"Father, let the Holy Spirit have full dominion over me, in my home, in my temper, in every word of my tongue, in every thought of my heart, in every feeling toward my fellow-men. Let the Holy Spirit have entire possession."

Is that what has been the longing and the covenant of your heart with your God-to be a man or a woman separated and given up unto the Holy Spirit? I pray you listen to the voice of heaven: "Separate me," said the Holy Spirit. Yes, separated unto the Holy Spirit. May God grant that the Word may enter into the very depths of our being to search us, and if we discover that we have not come out from the world entirely-if God discloses to us that self-life, self-will, self-exaltation are there-let us humble ourselves before Him.

Man, woman, brother, sister, you are a worker separated unto the Holy Spirit. Is that true? Has that been your longing desire? Has that been your surrender? Has that been what you have expected through faith in the power of our Risen and Almighty Lord Jesus? If not, here is the call of faith, and here is the key of blessing-separated unto the Holy Spirit. God write the word in our hearts!

I said the Holy Spirit spoke to that church as a church capable of doing that work. The Holy Spirit trusted them. God grant that our churches, our missionary societies, and our workers' unions, that all our directors and councils and committees may be men and women who are fit for the work of separating workers unto the Holy Spirit. We can ask God for that, too.

Then comes my fifth thought, and it is this: This holy partnership with the Holy Spirit in this work becomes a matter of consciousness and of action.

These men, what did they do? They set apart Paul and Barnabas, and then it is written of the two that they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, went down to Silica. Oh, what fellowship! The Holy Spirit in heaven doing part of the work, men on earth doing the other part. After the ordination of the men on earth, it is written in God's inspired Word that they were sent forth by the Holy Spirit.

And see how this partnership calls to new prayer and fasting. They had for a certain time been ministering to the Lord and fasting, perhaps days. The Holy Spirit speaks, and they have to do the work and to enter into partnership, and at once they come together for more prayer and fasting. That is the spirit in which they obey the command of their Lord. And that teaches us that it is not only in the beginning of our Christian work, but all along, that we need to have our strength in prayer. If there is one thought with regard to the Church of Christ which at times comes to me with overwhelming sorrow; if there is one thought in regard to my own life of which I am ashamed; if there is one thought of which I feel that the Church of Christ has not accepted and not grasped; if there is one thought which makes me pray to God: "Oh, teach us by Your grace, new things"-it is the wonderful power that prayer is meant to have in the Kingdom. We have so little availed ourselves of it.

We have all- read the expression of Christian in Bunyan's great work, when he found he had the key in his breast that should unlock the dungeon. We have the key that can unlock the dungeon of atheism for us. The Holy Spirit, into whose hands God has put the work, has been called "the executive of the Holy Trinity." The Holy Spirit has not only power, but He has the Spirit of love. He is brooding over this dark world and every sphere of work in it, and He is willing to bless. And why is there not more blessing? There can be only one answer. We have not honored the Holy Spirit as we should have done. Is there one who can say that that is not true? Is not every thoughtful heart ready to cry: "God forgive me that I have not honored the Holy Spirit as I should have done, that I have grieved Him, that I have allowed self, the flesh, and my own will to work where the Holy Spirit should have been honored! May God forgive me that I have allowed self, the flesh, and the will to actually have the place that God wanted the Holy Spirit to have."

Oh, the sin is greater than we know! No wonder that there is so much feebleness and failure in the Church of Christ!

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