

The Ministry of the Spirit

by Andrew Murray

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the Holy Spirit in the ministry, highlighting the need for believers to live in faith and to seek the power of the Spirit in their lives.

Scripture: Psalm 103:17, Jeremiah 31:3, John 17:11, Romans 8:26-27, Romans 8:34, Ephesians 3:20, Hebrews 7:25, 1 John 1:5, 1 John 2:2

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Christ's Intercession"

Description

The preacher delves into the concept of intercession, focusing on the Greek word 'entugchano,' which means to make petition or intercede for others. Christ, our Great High Priest, continuously intercedes on behalf of believers, ensuring their security and sanctification. The sermon emphasizes that Christ's intercession is real, involves active communication with the Father, and guarantees the believer's eternal salvation and fellowship with God. Through Christ's intercession, believers are kept from the sin of the world and provided with strength, comfort, and blessings.

Transcript

'Our sufficiency is of God ; who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant; not of the letter, but of the Spirit: for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death came with glory, how shall not rather the ministration of the Spirit be with glory ?'---2 Cor. 3:6, 7.

In none of his Epistles does Paul expound his conception of the Christian ministry so clearly and fully as in the second to the Corinthians. The need of vindicating his apostleship against detractors, the consciousness of Divine Power and Glory working in him in the midst of weakness, the intense longing of his loving heart to communicate what he had to impart, stir his soul to its very depths, and he lays open to us the inmost secrets of the life that makes one a true minister of Christ and His Spirit. In our text we have the central thought: he finds his sufficiency of strength, the inspiration and rule of all his conduct, in the fact that he has been made a minister of the Spirit. If we take the different passages in which mention is made of the Holy Spirit in the first half of the Epistle,' we shall see what, in his view, the place and work of the Holy Spirit in the ministry is, and what the character of a ministry under His leading and in His power.

In the Epistle, Paul will have to speak with authority. He begins by placing himself on a level with his readers. In his first mention of the Spirit he tells them that the Spirit that is in him is no other than is in them. ' Now He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and anointed us, is God; who also sealed us, and gave us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts' (1:21, 22). The anointing of the believer with the Spirit,

bringing him into fellowship with Christ, the anointed One, and revealing what He is to us; the sealing, marking him as God's own, and giving him assurance of it; the earnest of the Spirit, securing at once the foretaste and the fitness for the heavenly inheritance in glory: of all this he and they are together partakers. However much there was among the Corinthians, that was wrong and unholy, Paul speaks to them, thinks of them, and loves them as one in Christ 'He that stablisheth us with you in Christ, and anointed us,'-this deep sense of unity fills his soul, comes out throughout the Epistle, and is the secret of his power. See 1: 6, 10, 2: 3: 'My joy is the joy of you all;' 4:5: 'ourselves your servants;' 4: 10-12: 'death worketh in us, life in you;' 4:15: 'all things are for your sakes;' 6:11, 7: 3: 'you are in our hearts to live and die with you.' If the unity of the Spirit, the consciousness of being members one of another, be necessary in all believers, how much more must it be the mark of those who are ministers? The power of the ministry to the saints depends upon the unity of the Spirit; the full recognition of believers as partakers of the anointing. But to this end the minister must himself live as an anointed and sealed one, making manifest that he has the earnest of the Spirit in his heart.

The second passage is 3: 3: 'Ye are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh.' As distinct an act of God as was the writing of the law on the tables of stone, is the writing of the law of the Spirit in the new covenant, and of the name of Christ on the heart. It is a divine work, in which, as truly as God wrote of old, the Holy Spirit uses the tongue of His minister as His pen. It is this truth that needs to be restored in the ministry: not only that the Holy Spirit is needed, but that He waits to do the work, and that He will do it, when the right relation to Him is maintained. Paul's own experience at Corinth (Acts 18: 5-11; 1 Cor. 2:3) teaches us what conscious weakness, what fear and trembling, what sense of absolute helplessness may be, or rather is, needed, if the power of God is to rest upon us. Our whole Epistle confirms this: it was as a man under sentence of death, bearing about the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the power of Christ wrought in him. The Spirit of God stands in contrast to the flesh, the world, and self, with its life and strength; it is as these are broken down, and the flesh has nothing to glory in, that the Spirit will work. Oh that every minister's tongue might be prepared for the Holy Spirit to use it as a pen wherewith He writes!

Then come the words of our text (3: 6, 7), to teach us what the special characteristic is of this New Covenant Ministry of the Spirit: it gives life.' The antithesis, 'the letter killeth,' applies not only to the law of the Old Testament, but, according to the teaching of Scripture, to all knowledge which is not in the quickening power of the Spirit. We cannot insist upon it too earnestly, that, even as the law, though we know it was 'spiritual,' so the gospel too has its letter. The gospel may 'be preached most clearly and faithfully; it may exert a strong moral influence; and yet the faith that comes of it may stand in the wisdom of men, and not in the power of God. If there is one thing the Church needs to cry for on behalf of its ministers and students, it is that the Ministry of the Spirit may be restored in its full power. Pray that God may teach them what it is personally to live in the anointing, the sealing, the earnest of the Indwelling Spirit; what it is to know that the letter killeth; what it is that the Spirit in very deed giveth life; and what, above all, the personal life is under which the Ministry of the Spirit can freely work.

Paul now proceeds to contrast the two dispensations and the different characters of those who live in them.' He points out how, as long as the mind is blinded, there is a veil on the heart which can only be taken away as we turn to the Lord. And then he adds (3:17, 18): 'Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit.' It is because God 'is a Spirit' that He can give the Spirit. It was when our Lord Jesus was exalted into the life of

the Spirit that He became 'the Lord the Spirit,' could give the New Testament Spirit, and in the Spirit come Himself to His people. The disciples knew Jesus long, without knowing Him as the Lord the Spirit. Paul speaks of this, too, with regard to himself (2 Cor.5:16). There may in the ministry be much earnest gospel preaching of the Lord Jesus as the Crucified One, without the preaching of Him as the Lord the Spirit. It is only as the latter truth is apprehended, and experienced, and then preached, that the double blessing will come that Paul speaks of here. 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, is liberty:' believers will be led into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom.8: 2 ; Gal. 5:1,18). And then: 'we are transformed into the same image, even as from the Lord the Spirit.' He will do the work for which He was sent-to reveal the glory of the Lord in us and as we behold that glory, we shall be changed from glory to glory. Of the time before Pentecost it was written: 'The Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified.' But when He had been 'justified in the Spirit, and received up in glory,' the Spirit came forth from 'the excellent glory' into our hearts, that we, with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord might be changed into His likeness, from glory to glory. What a calling ! the Ministry of the Spirit! to hold up the glory of the Lord to His redeemed, and to be used by His Spirit in working their transformation into His likeness. 'Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, we faint not.' It is as the knowledge and acknowledgment of Christ as the Lord the Spirit, and of the Spirit, of Christ as changing believers into His likeness, lives in the Church, that the ministry among believers will be in Life and Power,-in very deed, a Ministry of the Spirit.

The power of the ministry on the Divine side is the Spirit; on the human, it is here, as everywhere, faith. The next mention of the Spirit is in 4:13 : ' Having the same Spirit of faith,' After having, in chap.3, set forth the glory of the Ministry of the Spirit, and, 4:1-6, the glory of the Gospel it preached, he turns to the vessels in which this treasure is. He has to vindicate his apparent weakness. But he does far more. Instead of apologizing for it, he expounds its Divine meaning and glory, He proves how just this constituted his power, because in his weakness Divine power could work. It has been so ordained, 'that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.' So his perfect fellowship with Jesus was maintained as he bore about 'the putting to death of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also might be manifested in his mortal body.' So there was even in his sufferings something of the vicarious element that marked his Lord's: 'So then death worketh in us, but life in you.' And then he adds, as the expression of the animating power that sustained him through all endurance and labour: 'But having the same Spirit of faith,' of which we read in the, Scripture, 'according to that which is written, I believed, and therefore did I speak; we also believe, and therefore we also speak; knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also with Jesus, and shall present us with you.'

Faith is the evidence of things not seen. It sees the Invisible, and lives in it. Beginning with trust in Jesus, ' in whom, though ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice,' it goes on through the whole of the Christian life. Whatever is of the Spirit, is by faith. The great work of God, in opening the heart of His child to receive more of the Spirit, is to school his faith into more perfect freedom from all that is seen, and the more entire repose in God, even to the assurance that God dwelleth and worketh mightily in his weakness. For this end trials and sufferings are sent. Paul uses very remarkable language in regard to his sufferings in the first chapter (ver. 9): 'We ourselves have had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.' Even Paul was in danger of trusting in himself. Nothing is more natural; all life is confident of self; and nature is consistent with itself till it dies. For the mighty work he had to do, he needed a trust in none less than the Living God, who raiseth the dead. To this God led him by giving him, in the affliction which came upon him in Asia, the sentence of death in himself. The trial of his faith was its strength. In our context he returns to this thought: the fellowship of the dying of Jesus is to him the means and the assurance of the experience of the power of Christ's life. In the spirit of this faith

he speaks: 'Knowing that He which raised up Jesus shall raise up us also.'

It was not until Jesus had died that the Spirit of life could break forth from Him. The life of Jesus was born out of the grave: it is a life out of death. It is as we daily die, and bear about the dying of Jesus; as flesh and self are kept crucified and mortified; as we have in ourselves God's sentence of death on all that is of self and nature, that the life and the Spirit of Jesus will be manifest in us. And this is the Spirit of faith, that in the midst of weakness and apparent death, it counts on God that raiseth the dead. And this is the Ministry of the Spirit, when faith glories in infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon it. It is as our faith does not stagger at the earthiness and weakness of the vessel, as it consents that the excellency of the power shall be, not from ourselves, or in anything we feel, but of God alone, that the Spirit will work in the power of the living God.

We have the same thought in the two remaining passages. In chap. 5:5, he speaks again of 'the earnest of the Spirit' in connection with our groaning and being burdened. And then in chap.6: 6, the Spirit is introduced in the midst of the mention of his distresses and labours as the mark of his ministry. 'In everything commending ourselves, as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, . . . in the Holy Ghost, . . . as dying, and yet, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich.' The Power of Christ in the Holy Spirit was to Paul such a living reality, that the weakness of the flesh only led him the more to rejoice and to trust it. The Holy Spirit's dwelling and working in Him was consciously the secret spring and the Divine power of his ministry.

We may well ask, Does the Holy Spirit take the place in our ministry He did in Paul's ? There is not a minister or member of the Church who has not a vital interest in the answer. The question is not whether the doctrine of the absolute need of the Holy Spirit's working is admitted; but whether there is given to the securing of His presence and working that proportion of the time and life, of the thought and faith of the ministry, which His place, as the Spirit of the Lord Jesus on the Throne, demands. Has the Holy Spirit the place in the Church which our Lord Jesus would wish Him to have? When our hearts open to the inconceivably glorious Truth that He is the Mighty Power of God dwelling in us, that in Him the Living Christ works through us, that He is the Real Presence with us of the Glorified Lord on the Throne, we shall feel that the one need of the ministry and the Church is this: to wait at the footstool of the Throne without ceasing for the clothing with the Power that comes from on high. The Spirit of Christ, in His love and power, in His death and life, is the Spirit of the ministry. As it possesses this, it will be what the Head of the Church meant it to be, the Ministry of the Spirit.

Blessed Father! we thank Thee for the institution of the Ministry of the Word, as the great means through which our exalted Lord does His saving work by the Holy Spirit. We thank Thee that it is a Ministry of the Spirit, and for all the blessing Thou hast wrought through it in the world. Our prayer is, most Blessed God! that Thou wouldst increasingly and manifestly make it throughout Thy Church what Thou wouldst have it be—a Ministry of the Spirit and of Power.

Give Thy servants and people everywhere a deep sense of how much it still comes short of Thy purpose. Reveal how much there is in it of trust in the flesh, of man's zeal and strength, of the wisdom of this world. Teach all Thy true servants the holy secret of giving place to the Spirit of Christ, that He may use them. May the conscious presence of Christ in their hearts by the Holy Spirit give them great boldness of speech. May the power of the Holy Spirit in their whole life make them fit vessels for Him to use in teaching others. May Divine Power in the midst of weakness be the mark of their public ministry.

Teach Thy people to wait on their teaching, to receive it, to plead with Thee for it as a Ministry of the Spirit. And may the lives of believers increasingly be, in the power of such a ministry, those of men led and sanctified by the Holy Ghost. Amen,

' We are also weak In Him, but shall live with Him through the power of God toward you.' With martyrs and missionaries, persecution and tribulation have been the fellowship of Christ's suffering and weakness, His Power and Spirit. We may invite neither persecutions nor suffering ; how can in our days this fellowship of Christ's suffering and dying, the rending of the flesh, so indispensable to the Ministry of the Spirit, be maintained ? In a deep entering into the needs and the sorrows of the suffering humanity around us. And in that self-denial which in nothing allows the flesh, the self-life, to have its way, but increasingly seeks in utter weakness to make way for Christ's power to work, and depends upon His Spirit.

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