

The Spirit and the Word

by Andrew Murray

The Spirit is the life-giving principle that makes the Word alive and powerful in our lives.

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, John 6:63, John 6:68, Romans 8:11, 1 Corinthians 15:45, 2 Corinthians 3:6, Galatians 5:25, Ephesians 6:17, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "The Role of the Holy Spirit", "Understanding God's Word"

Description

Andrew Murray emphasizes the vital role of the Holy Spirit in understanding and experiencing the Word of God, asserting that while the flesh is of no profit, the Spirit brings life. He explains that Jesus' words are not merely for intellectual comprehension but are meant to be received into the very life of believers, requiring a spiritual nature to truly grasp their meaning. Murray warns against the errors of seeking the Spirit without the Word and vice versa, urging believers to recognize that the Spirit quickens the Word, making it alive and powerful. He encourages a deep reliance on the Holy Spirit to reveal the truths of Scripture, highlighting that true understanding comes from a life transformed by the Spirit. Ultimately, he calls for a humble approach to Scripture, acknowledging the need for the Spirit's guidance in all interactions with God's Word.

Transcript

'It is the Spirit that quickeneth ; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I have spoken unto you are Spirit and are life. Lord, to whom shall we go? I Thou hast the words of eternal life.'--John 6: 63, 68.

'The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.'-2 Cor. 3: 6.

Our Blessed Lord had been speaking of Himself as the Bread of Life, and of His flesh and blood as the meat and drink of eternal Life. To many of His disciples it was a hard saying, which they could not understand. Jesus tells them that it is only when the Holy Spirit is come, and they have Him, that His words will become clear to them. He says, 'It is the Spirit that quickeneth ; the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I have spoken unto you, they are Spirit, and they are Life.'

'It is the Spirit that quickeneth,' in these words and the corresponding ones of Paul, ' the Spirit giveth life,' we have the nearest approach to what may be called a definition of the Spirit. (Comp. 1 Cor. 15: 45, 'a life-giving Spirit.') The Spirit always acts, in the first place, whether in nature or grace, as a Life-giving principle. It is of the deepest importance to keep firm hold on this. His work in the believer, of Sealing, Sanctifying, Enlightening, and Strengthening, is all rooted in this: it is as He is known and honoured, and

place given to Him, as He is waited on as the Inner Life of the soul, that His other gracious workings can be experienced. These are but the outgrowth of the Life ; it is in the power of the Life within that they can be enjoyed. 'It is the Spirit that quickeneth.'

In contrast to the Spirit our Lord places the flesh. He says, 'the flesh profiteth nothing.' He is not speaking of the flesh as the fountain of sin, but in its religious aspect, as it is the power in which the natural man, or even the believer who does not fully yield to the Spirit, seeks to serve God, or to know and possess Divine things. The futile character of all its efforts our Lord indicates in the words, 'profiteth nothing;' they are not sufficient, they avail not to reach the Spiritual reality, the Divine things themselves. Paul means the same when he contrasts with the Spirit, the letter that killeth. The whole Dispensation of the Law was but a dispensation of the letter and the flesh. Though it had a certain glory, and Israel's privileges were very great, yet, as Paul says, 'Even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.'

Even Christ Himself, as long as He was in the flesh, and until, in the rending of the veil of His flesh, the dispensation of the Spirit took the place of that of the flesh, could not by His words effect in His disciples what He desired. 'It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing!'

Our Lord applies this saying now specially to the words He had just spoken, and the Spiritual truth they contained. 'The words that I have spoken unto you are Spirit and are Life.' He wishes to teach the disciples two things. The one is, that the words are indeed a living seed, with a power of germinating and springing up, asserting their own vitality, revealing their meaning, and proving their Divine Power in those who receive them and keep them abiding in the heart. He wanted them not to be discouraged if they could not at once comprehend them. His words are Spirit and Life; they are not meant for the understanding, but for the Life. Coming in the Power of the Unseen Spirit, higher and deeper than all thought, they enter into the very roots of the Life, they have themselves a Divine Life, working out effectually with a Divine energy the Truth they express into the experience of those who receive them. As a consequence of this their spiritual character--this is the other lesson He wished His disciples to learn--these words of His need a spiritual nature to receive them. Seed needs a congenial soil: there must be life in the soil as well as in the seed. Not into the mind only, nor into the feelings, nor ever, the will alone must the word be taken, but through them into the life. The centre of that life is man's spiritual nature, with conscience as its voice ; there the authority of the word must be acknowledged. But even this is not enough: conscience dwells in man as a captive amid powers it cannot control. It is the Spirit that comes from God, the Spirit that Christ came to bring, becoming our life, receiving the word and assimilating it to our life, that will make them to become the Truth and Power in us.

In our study of the work of the Blessed Spirit, we cannot be too careful to get clear and firm hold ,of this blessed truth. It will save us from right-hand and left-hand errors. It will keep us from expecting to enjoy the teaching of the Spirit without the Word, or to master the teaching of the Word without the Spirit.

On the one side, we have the right-hand error, seeking the teaching of the Spirit without the Word. In the Holy Trinity, the Word and the Spirit are ever in each other, one with the Father. It is not otherwise with the God-inspired Words of Scripture. The Holy Spirit has for all ages embodied the thoughts of God in the written word, and lives now for this very purpose in our hearts, there to reveal the power and the meaning of that Word. If you would be full of the Spirit, be full of the Word, If you would have the Divine Life of the Spirit within you grow strong, and acquire power in every part of your nature; let the Word of Christ dwell richly in you. If you would have the Spirit fulfil His office of Remembrancer, calling to mind at the right

moment, and applying with Divine accuracy what Jesus has spoken to your need, have the Words of Christ abiding in you. If you would have the Spirit reveal to you the Will of God in each circumstance of life, choosing from apparently conflicting commands or Principles with unerring precision what you must do, and suggesting it as you need, oh ! have the Word living in you, ready for His use. If you would have the Eternal Word as your Light, let the Written Word be transcribed on your heart by the Holy Spirit. 'The Words that I have spoken unto you, they are Spirit and are Life.' Take them and treasure them: it is through them that the Spirit manifests His quickening power.'

On the other side, we have the left-hand and more common error. Think not for one moment that the Word can unfold its Life in thee, except as the Spirit within thee accepts and appropriates it in the inner life. How much of Scripture reading, and Scripture study, and Scripture preaching is there in which the first and main object is to reach the meaning of the Word? Men think that if they know correctly and exactly what it means, there will come as a natural consequence the blessing the Word is meant to bring. This is by no means the case. The Word is a seed. In every seed there is a fleshy part, in which the life is hidden. One may have the most precious and perfect seed in its bodily substance, and yet unless it be exposed in suitable soil to the influence of sun and moisture, the life may never grow up. And so we may hold the words and the doctrines of Scripture most intelligently and earnestly, and yet know little of their life or power. We need to remind ourselves and the Church unceasingly, that the Scriptures which were spoken by holy men of old as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, can only be understood by holy men as they are taught by the same Spirit. The words I have spoken are Spirit and Life;' for the apprehending and partaking of them ' the flesh profiteth nothing : it is the Spirit that quickeneth,' the Spirit of Life within us.

This is one of the awfully solemn lessons which the history of the Jews in the time of Christ teaches us. They were exceeding zealous, as they thought, for God's word and honour, and yet it turned out that all their zeal was for their human interpretation of God's word. Jesus said to them: 'Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me: and ye will not come to me that ye may have life.' They did indeed trust to the Scriptures to lead them to eternal life; and yet they never saw that they testified of Christ, and so they would not come to Him. They studied and accepted Scripture in the light and in the power of their human understanding, and not in the light and power of God's Spirit as their life. The feebleness of the life of so many believers who read and know Scripture much has no other cause; they know not that it is the Spirit that quickeneth that the flesh, that the human understanding, however intelligent, however earnest, profiteth nothing. They think that in the Scriptures they have eternal life, but the living Christ, in the power of the Spirit, as their life, they know but little.

What is needed is very simple: the determined refusal to attempt to deal with the written word without the quickening Spirit. Let us never take Scripture into our hand, or mind, or mouth, without realizing the need and the promise of the Spirit. First, in a quiet act of worship, look to God to give and renew the workings of His Spirit within you; then, in a quiet act of faith, yield yourself to the power that dwells in you, and wait on Him, that not the mind alone, but the life in you, may be opened to receive the Word. Let the Holy Spirit be your life. To the Spirit and the Life coming out from within to meet the Word from without as its food, the words of Christ are indeed Spirit and Life.

As we further follow the teaching of our Blessed Lord as to the Spirit, it will become clear to us that, as the Lord's Words are Spirit and Life, so the Spirit must be in us as the Spirit of our Life, Our inmost personal life must be the Spirit of God.

Deeper down than mind, or feeling, or will, the very root of all these, and their animating principle, there must be the Spirit of God. As we seek to go lower down than these, as we see that nothing can reach the Spirit of Life which there is in the words of the Living God, and wait on the Holy Spirit within us, in the unseen depths of the hidden life, to receive and reveal the words in His quickening power, and work them into the very life of our life, we shall know in truth what it means: 'It is the Spirit that quickeneth.' We shall see how divinely right and becoming it is that the words which are Spirit and Life should be met in us by the Spirit and the Life dwelling within, how then alone they will unfold their meaning and impart their substance, and give their divine strength and fulness to the Spirit and the Life already within us.

O my God! again I thank Thee for the wonderful gift of the indwelling Spirit. And I humbly beseech Thee anew that I may indeed know that He is in me, and how glorious the divine work He is carrying on. Teach me specially, I pray Thee, to believe that He is the life and the strength of the growth of the Divine life within me, the pledge and assurance that I can grow up into all my God would have me. As I see this, I shall understand how He, as the Spirit of the Life within me, will make my spirit hunger for the Word as the food of the life, will receive and assimilate it, will indeed make it Life and Power.

Forgive me, my God, that I have so much sought to apprehend Thy words, which are Spirit and Life, in the power of human thought and the fleshly mind. I have been so slow to learn that the flesh profiteth nothing. I do desire to learn it now.

O my Father! give me the Spirit of wisdom, grant me the mighty workings of the Spirit, that I may know how deeply spiritual each word of Thine is, and how spiritual things can only be spiritually discerned. - Teach me in all my intercourse with Thy word to deny the flesh and the fleshly mind, to wait in deep humility and faith for the inward working of the Spirit to quicken the word. May thus all my meditation of Thy Word, all my keeping of it in faith and obedience, be in Spirit and in Truth, in Life and Power. Amen.

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