

St. Paul Arranges a Bouquet of Christian Graces.

by Daniel Steele

The sermon emphasizes the importance of developing milder virtues, such as kindness and gentleness, in Christianity, which are made possible by the Holy Spirit's work in believers.

Scripture: John 15:5, Ephesians 4:32, Philippians 4:5, Colossians 3:12, James 3:17

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Christian Virtues"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the transformation of the apostles before and after the day of Pentecost, emphasizing the evidence of their new birth through Christ's declarations and the changes wrought in them by the Pentecostal gift. The sermon delves into the virtues displayed by the apostles post-Pentecost, such as tender-heartedness, kindness, gentleness, and fairness, which were empowered by the Holy Spirit. Steele highlights the importance of these milder virtues over heroic virtues, as they reflect the work of the Holy Spirit in believers and are essential for true Christian living and effective evangelism.

Transcript

Before the day of Pentecost the apostles had experienced the new birth. Proof. First Negative. The absurdity of giving to unregenerate men the great commission to disciple all nations (Matt. 28:19, 20), with the promise of Christ's gracious presence. If Christ, the Head of the church, sent forth unconverted men to convert the world, his church would be justified in following his example of knowingly ordaining unsaved ministers of the gospel. But our positive proof that the apostles were in a state of grace before the effusion of the Spirit is found in Christ's own declarations. "I am the vine, ye are the branches," "Now ye are clean through the word," "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." Yet the pentecostal gift wrought a wonderful transformation in these men who had already been born again. The changes wrought in them required the application of terms not found in the four Gospels. Let us examine them. In Eph. 4:32 is the adjective *eusplanknos*, "tender-hearted." In 1 Pet. 3:8, it is rendered "pitiful." This virtue proud Rome despised, and treated its possessors with contempt. When in the Flavian Amphitheater, or Coliseum, where gladiators were led into the arena to butcher one another on festive days, if anyone in that vast assembly of eighty thousand was seen to shed a tear, the police immediately arrested such an offender against good order and excluded him from the building. He manifested a weakness not in harmony with Roman iron-heartedness, which was called *eusplanknos*, 'strong-bowelled,' spirited, bold, undaunted. St. Paul and St. Peter use the same word: but they read into it a sense entirely different -- compassionate,

tender-hearted. The heart of steel, which boasted of its ability to resist all appeals to the natural sensibilities, is still the same strong heart; but it is strong to express the divine tenderness which has been poured into it from above as a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Hence the word used by profane writers to signify iron-heartedness is used after Pentecost to signify the sympathetic and pitiful heart. Therefore we may say that the fullness of the Spirit has actually converted at least one Greek word from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh. This is an earnest of the transfiguration and glorification of all the languages of this Babel earth by the gospel of Christ in its universal triumph.

There are three words for gentleness which are new bottles to hold the pentecostal wine. The first is *chraestotae*, "benignity," kindness, and gentleness. The most noted instance of the use of this word is found in Col. 3:12, where the apostle makes a fragrant bouquet, by grouping together all the virtues which characterize a divine philanthropy. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing, and forgiving, and above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness." All these flowers have the smell of heaven upon them. The only soil on earth into which they can be successfully transplanted are human souls cleansed and filled by the Holy Spirit. Genuine kindness is a divine attribute brought down from heaven by the Son of God. Then it was "that the kindness and love -- Greek, *philanthropy* -- of God, our Savior, toward man appeared." -- Tit. 3:4. St. Paul is the only writer in the New Testament who uses *aepios*, "gentle." This word etymologically indicates a gentleness that expresses itself in the form of affability, a kindness which has its value, despite the proverb that "kind words butter no parsnips." In 1 Thess. 2:7, St. Paul professes the gentleness of the softly-speaking nurse cherishing the children committed to her care. In 2 Tim. 2:24, he insists on the necessity of this quality in every true "servant of the Lord." He "must be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient in meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves."

The last of the three post-pentecostal words for gentleness is *epieikeia*, "fairness," mildness, called by Matthew Arnold, "sweet reasonableness." It pertains more especially to exterior demeanor, to intercourse with others, while the grace of *praotae*, "meekness," with which it is joined as descriptive of Christ in 2 Cor. 10:1, is rather an interior disposition and an absolute virtue. This relative excellence, so aptly described by Arnold, Christians are commanded in Phil. 4:5 to make known unto all men. The unfortunate word "moderation," found in the A. V., has been used as a couch of sloth by many when exhorted to strenuous Christian effort. We are glad that the R. V. has used the word "forbearance" instead of "moderation," thus removing this couch from beneath the spiritual sluggard.

In James 3:17, the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then radiant with all the lenient and gentle graces. These demonstrate to worldlings the heavenly origin of the evangel which we are commanded to preach to every creature by devout living as well as by persistent testimony. It is the absence of these fruits of the heavenly vine which obstructs the spread of the gospel at home and in pagan lands. The pagans have keen eyesight. They are studying the question whether Christianity is a mere ideal system, not adapted to men under the dominion of sin, or whether it is a practical scheme of deliverance from the guilt of sin, the love of sin, and the indwelling of sin; in other words, whether the missionary is as good as his book. The great need of the world is not more professors of Christianity. but more Christ-like men and women. Professors may be multiplied on the plane of nature where the gospel has become fashionable. But Christ-like people are the creation of a supernatural agency, even the Holy Spirit in his personal inworking and abiding. That Christianity may attain its maximum power to transform men and elevate society, there must be a radical work wrought with nominal believers who not only do not shine themselves, but, what is worse, they obstruct rays which radiate from truly consecrated souls. It is not only

true that one sinner destroys much good, but one dead church member casts an eclipse on many souls who would otherwise see Christ, the Light of the world.

In conclusion, we say that the surprising contrast between the teachings of the New Testament and that of the philosophers and moralists is in the importance it assigns to the milder virtues, and the discount it places on the heroic virtues. reversing the order of their importance. The work of the Holy Spirit in the fullness of his incoming and abiding in the believer is conspicuous in the development of those virtues which proud philosophy despised, although their universal diffusion would increase the happiness of mankind greatly.

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