

The Spirit in the Church

by Dougan Clark

The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in the Church, guiding and empowering believers to worship and serve God through spiritual gifts and expressions of worship.

Scripture: John 4:24, 1 Corinthians 12:4, 1 Corinthians 14:3, 1 Corinthians 14:26, Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 4:3, Ephesians 4:11, Hebrews 4:14, 1 Peter 2:5, 1 John 1:3

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Worship"

Description

Dougan Clark preaches about the importance of Christ exercising His headship over the visible Church through the Holy Spirit, guiding both the service and worship of God's people. He emphasizes the individual believers receiving various gifts from the Holy Spirit for the benefit of the body and the invisible yet real presence of Christ in every assembly of true worshippers. Clark discusses the transition from the Levitical priesthood to the priesthood of all believers under the Gospel dispensation, highlighting the need for true worship to be spiritual and directed by Christ, the Great High Priest.

Transcript

It is by, and through, the Holy Spirit, that Christ exercises His Headship over the visible Church. Both the service and the worship of God's people--the former typified in the Mosaic ritual by the work of the Levites; the latter, by that of the priests--are to be under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Upon individual believers He bestows a variety of gifts, to be exercised for the good of the body. And He Himself presides, invisibly but really, over every assembly of true worshippers.

Under the former dispensation, the whole congregation of Israel made their offerings, and performed their worship through the intervention of an anointed priesthood. The whole congregation, likewise, performed the service of the sanctuary, through the Levites, who were purified and set apart, that they might represent all the tribes in that special office. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." And so, we find Priests and Levites--the official worshippers and the official workers of the chosen people--frequently associated in the sacred narrative.

But the Levitical priesthood, with its offerings and its ritual, was abolished when Christ had offered "one sacrifice for sins forever;" "had entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us," and had "sat down on the right hand of God."

Nevertheless, God's people, under the Gospel dispensation, are still a "kingdom of priests;" and the Church on earth, by virtue of its union with Christ, the ever-living Head, through the Spirit, is invested with both regal and priestly dignity. Furthermore, as every individual believer is a priest, in God's kingdom, it follows that he can do his own worshipping, nay, must do it: for "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him, must worship Him in Spirit and in truth."

There is no need for the pomp and splendor of an outward ritual; and just as little, of the intervention of a human priesthood, to enable the believer to "offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ." Nothing whatever should come between our souls and God, but Christ, the Great High Priest, who has ascended up on high, and "ever liveth, to make intercession for us." True worship is spiritual, and is performed acceptably wherever the sincere heart is lifted up to the Father of Spirits, in adoring gratitude and love.

And is it not sad to see the extent to which the equality and priesthood of believers have been lost sight of in the Church of Christ? Instead of gathering immediately to Christ, and seeking the light and power of His Spirit, to qualify us to worship Him aright, we must still look--virtually, if not actually--to some human head or leader, pope or bishop, priest or minister, to do our worshipping for us. And we must have buildings, splendid in their architecture, and costly in their decorations; we must have beautiful attractions for the eye, and artistic music for the ear; and the time of our public worship must be taken up largely, with seeing, and hearing, and doing certain things which have been prescribed and pre-arranged by others.

Now, I am very far from saying that our Heavenly Father may not be worshipped acceptably, nor that He is not worshipped acceptably by many, in the midst of all these accompaniments and surroundings--which, in their nature, would appear to be more sensuous than spiritual--but I am jealous of the idea, that it is only these, and only by human instrumentality, or under human leadership, that the Church of Christ may rightly and properly unite in social worship.

If Christ, by His Spirit, is present with the two or three, or any larger number of gathered worshippers, then it is to Him, above all and beyond all, that we are to look. And, whether in vocal utterances, or in the silent adoration of the humble heart, it is in dependence upon Him, and under His guidance that we are to offer up true worship.

While, then, right worship may be in silence, it is not necessarily so; nor do I believe that it will often be the case that an assembly of Christians, gathered under the influence of the Spirit, and every one truly led by Him, will perform their worship wholly in silence. For, while the Holy Ghost is ever present, and--as representing Christ, the living Head--is always to be sought unto first of all, He also graciously bestows His gifts, dividing to every man, severally, as He will. And it is, especially, when gathered for public worship that these gifts are to be exercised; sometimes for the profit of the whole assembly, sometimes for the special need of individuals.

These gifts, as they existed in the Apostolic age, are enumerated in the twelfth chapter of 1st Corinthians. I shall not discuss them here, but leave my reader to examine for himself the disquisitions of Christian scholars, upon the nature and peculiarities of these bestowments of the Spirit.

In the fourth chapter of Ephesians we find the Apostle employing the following language: "And He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints; for the work of the ministry; for the edifying of the body of Christ." I infer, from these inspired words, that God gives to His Church, in every age, gifted men and women, whose calling

and qualification are from the Holy Spirit, and who, under His guidance and direction, may "prophesy" or preach, with the result--by Divine grace--of converting sinners and strengthening believers.

I use the phrase men and women advisedly, because, here again, the Church of Christ has been, and continues to be, quite too slow of heart, to accept the fact that "there is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female, but ye are all one in Christ Jesus." By so doing, she is evidently limiting the Holy One, who pours out His Spirit upon daughters as well as sons, handmaidens as well as servants--that they may prophesy. I shall not argue the question, but simply express my firm belief that the authority of Holy Scripture, and the example of the early Church, recognize the ministry of women, and place it on precisely the same ground as that of men; and that is--the calling and qualification of the Spirit.

The "apostles" and "prophets" spake to the men of their own generation, and under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost; and they wrote the Books of the Bible, through which they continue to speak to the men of all generations. The apostolic and prophetic gifts--as they were possessed by the writers of Holy Scripture--have ceased to exist in the Church. Since the book of Revelation was written, no man has claimed, or could justly claim, that he was inspired in the same sense in which the writers of the Bible were inspired.

But evangelists, pastors and teachers, are still continued to the Church. The evangelist preaches glad tidings. He proclaims salvation through a crucified and risen Lord. When baptized with the Holy Ghost, he speaks, as with a tongue of fire, to the unregenerate; and the thing he is engaged about, above all things else, is the conversion of sinners.

The pastors and teachers, on the other hand, though receiving their qualification from the same Spirit who energizes the evangelist, are especially concerned, and empowered, to build up believers in the most holy faith; to administer milk to babes, and strong meat to strong men; to impart new truth to the inexperienced Christian; to expound the Holy Scriptures; to reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.

The evangelist, the pastor, and the teacher, are not infrequently combined in the same individual, but oftener this is not the case; and it is very important for every one to keep to his own gift, improve it, grow in it, and use it to the glory of God, and the good of His Church; while he should not be seeking, restlessly, to imitate others, or mistakenly suppose that he must be, and do, in all things like those whose gifts may be wholly different from his own.

On the other hand, a Christian believer who is diligently occupying the gift which the Holy Spirit has bestowed upon him, must not judge another who is led, it may be, by the same Spirit into a line of service entirely different from that to which he may feel called. Every one's proper business is, not to be inquiring, "What shall this man do?" but, to be carefully heeding the injunction, "Follow thou Me!"

Prophesying, or preaching, is ranked by Paul as the highest of the gifts of the Spirit; and this consists in power to speak for "exhortation, edification, and comfort." He tells us, especially to covet this gift. And Moses was of the same mind, when he said: "I would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them."

The call and qualification for the minister, then, is from the Holy Ghost. It may be given to, and exercised by, the same or different individuals, in the way of evangelizing, teaching, exhorting, edifying, or comforting; but the Spirit gives power and unction to the truths which are spoken, and renders them

effective in persuading and influencing the minds of the hearers.

Now, when the church is assembled for public worship, there is a special opportunity, as well as a peculiar fitness, for the exercise of these various gifts of the Spirit. First and foremost, let the minds and hearts of the worshippers be gathered to Christ Himself, who, by His Holy Spirit, meets with them according to His own gracious promise, and is their real, though invisible Head. Let the attitude of the soul be an attitude of receptivity and expectancy; and let every one say with the Psalmist, "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from Him."

A meeting thus gathered in the name of Jesus, and consisting entirely of Christian believers, will sometimes find that they are tendered, and strengthened, and instructed, and comforted, and edified by the direct working of the Holy Spirit Himself upon their hearts; and without any human ministry whatever. Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton called such precious seasons of stillness and waiting upon God, "divine silence."

"Yea," says Robert Barclay, "though there be not a word spoken, yet is the true spiritual worship performed, and the body of Christ edified; yea, it may, and hath often fallen out among us, that divers meetings have passed without one word, and yet our souls have been deeply edified and refreshed, and our hearts wonderfully overcome with the secret sense of God's power and Spirit, which, without words have been ministered from one vessel to another."

Much oftener, however, even in gatherings of believers, such silent waiting--unspeakably precious though it be--is but the preparation for vocal utterances by some, and for the reception and assimilation of the truth thus conveyed, by others. Very generally, if all are truly waiting upon God, He will put forth one or more of His servants or hand-maidens, in the exercise of some one of the precious gifts of the Spirit. And, as He puts thoughts into the hearts, and words into the mouths of these, their doctrine does indeed "drop as the rain;" their speech does indeed "distill as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the shower upon the grass;" and wonderfully refreshing to the souls of the hearers are these messages of heavenly love.

Accordingly, in another place, we find Robert Barclay again saying: "And God is not wanting to move in His children to bring forth words of exhortation and prayer when it is needful: so that of the many gatherings and meetings of such as are convinced of the truth, there is scarce any in which God raiseth not up some or other to minister to his brethren: and there are few meetings that are altogether silent."

In meetings of Christians, the exercise of the ministry will consist principally in words of exhortation, testimony, comfort and encouragement, or vocal prayers and praises. In meetings appointed for the unconverted there is a special field for the exercise of the gift of the evangelist, telling men the glad tidings of salvation, and persuading them to accept it. For this good news is indeed like cold water to the thirsty soul.

But most of our gatherings for public worship are mixed assemblies, consisting of both the converted and the unconverted. And this being the case, the anointed minister of Christ will often find it necessary and proper to address different states and conditions in the same discourse. He must always preach Christ crucified and Christ arisen; but he must present Him to the sinner as his only hope of pardon; to the believer as his sanctification; to the desponding and discouraged, as his burden-bearer and sin-bearer: to the feeble, as his power: to all as their only Saviour. He who thus ministers, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, does indeed bring forth, out of the inexhaustible treasury of God's grace, "things new and old." Like

the Benjamites he can "sling stones at an hair-breadth, and not miss."

There is not, so far as I have discovered, the slightest sanction in Scripture, for confining the ministry, in any meeting for worship, to one person. "Ye may all prophesy one by one," says Paul. The necessary point is to leave everything to the direction of the Holy Spirit. If He lays the service all on one person, let that person faithfully perform it in His strength: and let the rest pray for him, and thankfully receive his message. But "if anything be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace." In other words, let the Spirit have His own way, and let His gifts be exercised by one or another as He puts forth. Thus all things in public worship will be done decently and in order, and all things to the glory of God.

In point of fact it will, and does, occur that in some meetings (and this, I believe, is especially the case with those held on the morning of the Lord's day) the service will, to a large extent, devolve on one minister, or on a very few. The gospel needs, on such occasions, to be preached intelligently, in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; and the word so divided as to be adapted to the different conditions of the minds of the hearers.

But in other meetings it will sometimes happen that if all are in their proper places, and remain so, the Apostle's language will be applicable, "Every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation." In other words, very many voices will be heard telling one by one what the Lord hath done for their souls: exhorting others to seek Him: praying to Him; or praising Him, even, it may be, with a song or a psalm.

For we must not forget, and this remark is especially worthy of note by members of the religious Society of Friends, that there is such a thing as singing with the spirit and with the understanding also; just as there is praying with the spirit and with the understanding also: and both mean, as I apprehend, singing or praying with the human spirit and understanding of the believer operated upon and influenced by the Divine Spirit.

I have nothing whatever to say in favor of "the formal customary way of singing," nor in favor of those uniting in the singing of public worship who cannot from the heart adopt the sentiments of the psalm or hymn.

"Speaking to yourselves," says the Apostle, "in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord." And again, "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

It will be seen at once, therefore, that singing, under the influence of the Spirit, is an acceptable and proper mode of worship; and not to be ignored or discarded; and to be able to sing the gospel, or to praise God in melodious words, may be as certainly a gift of the Spirit, as to preach the gospel, or to pray to the edification of the church.

Again, I quote from the author of the "Apology for the true Christian Divinity": "As to the singing of psalms, there will not be need of any long discourse: for that the case is just the same as in the two former, of preaching and prayer. We confess this to be a part of God's worship, and very sweet and refreshing, when it proceeds from a true sense of God's love in the heart, and arises from the divine influence of the Spirit, which leads souls to breathe forth, either a sweet harmony, or words suitable to the present condition; whether they be words formerly used by the saints and recorded in Scripture, such as the Psalms of David, or other words; as were the hymns and songs of Zacharias, Simeon, and the Blessed Virgin Mary."

Under the gospel dispensation, the believer receives, with the baptism of the Holy Ghost, the tongue of fire; and the tongue and voice are the Christian's instruments of praise. I certainly do not regard instrumental music, therefore, a necessary, nor indeed scarcely an admissible part of public worship. It is neither enjoined nor sanctioned in the New Testament, and I believe that it were quite better that worshipping congregations should confine themselves to vocal utterances of praise.

And, singing itself, as intimated in the above quotation, should be placed on precisely the same ground as preaching and praying. It should be the result of the constraining influence of the Spirit. And, to exercise this gift does not necessarily require the thoroughly artistic ear, nor the trained voice. It is lamentable to hear of Christian churches committing their singing entirely into the hands of an educated choir; whose qualification is, not that they are earnest, whole-hearted Christians, but that they are good singers; and of whom it is at least sometimes said that some of them are unconverted, nay, even unbelievers.

I do not enter into the question of the time and trouble needful to acquire reasonable skill in singing, nor the many difficulties which, as I admit, attend the practical carrying out of the general principles I have expressed. But, if the Church is really filled with the Spirit, these difficulties become much less than at first sight they would appear to be.

One who has some knowledge of singing, feels in a meeting for worship, a gentle impulse from the Spirit to sing a hymn or a psalm. He obeys in the same meekness and dependence on Divine aid, that he would exercise if the impulse were to preach, exhort, or pray. Who shall say him nay? And if another, and another, feel the same influence impelling them to join in the singing, who shall condemn them? And if the whole congregation, constrained by the Holy Spirit, shall unite in these songs of praise, is not God as certainly glorified thereby as by any other exercise engaged in under the same promptings?

And let none be offended if the melody thus breathed forth from the humble devoted child of God is not of the most scientific character. There is a great deal of preaching and praying which would not commend itself to learned theologians either as to matter or manner, but which, nevertheless, is blessed of the Lord to the saving of those that believe; and for the reason that it contains God's simple truth applied by the Holy Spirit. And must there be no singing that is not in the very highest style of the art?

An educated musician once remarked that Sankey's singing was "beneath criticism." The remark was doubtless unjust, even from an artistic point of view; but even if it had been true, hundreds of souls have, by Sankey's singing, been brought to Christ. Is not that better than the most artistic music and no conversions?

I do not mean that to sing properly and artistically is not a matter of importance; but that it is not indispensable to true worship, any more than logical and eloquent preaching, both being, nevertheless, very desirable. The one thing needful for preaching, praying, or singing, is that it be under the direction of the Spirit.

A minister of the Society of Friends once felt it right, in a large meeting, to sing the well-known hymn, "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by." He had no sooner completed it than a young man rose in the assembly and begged that he might be prayed for, as he regarded this as God's last call to him, a hitherto impenitent sinner. The result was, I believe, his conversion.

The reading of the Holy Scriptures, as a part of public worship, is oft times most appropriate and edifying. This practice has the sanction of the Saviour, of the Apostles, and of evangelical Christians generally. The

Book which is given by inspiration of God; which is profitable for so many things; through the patience and comfort of which we have hope; "which is able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus;" and which we are commanded to search; cannot safely be excluded from our public assemblies.

The public reading of Scripture is, however, to be placed precisely on the same basis as preaching, praying, and singing--that, namely, of the leading of the Holy Spirit. If engaged in formally, and as a matter of course, it may, and often will--just as any other act of worship--speedily become a dry and useless thing. It is the Spirit that giveth life to the letter. But the Spirit does operate with peculiar power in connection with His own Book. And if any child of God feels impelled by the Spirit to read a portion of Scripture in the assembled church--which I am confident will very often be the case, if all are in their proper places--he or she should do so, without let or hindrance.

Neither the reading of the Bible, nor the exercise of any gift of the Spirit, is to be forbidden or repressed in any of our meetings; yet a due regard must always be paid to the proprieties of time and circumstance, and the suggestions of a sanctified judgment must be received as interpreters of the mind of the Spirit. The spirit of the prophets must be subject to the prophets, and all things must be done decently and in order. "God is not the Author of confusion."

And, as already intimated, some meetings are, as a rule, more appropriate for the exercise of one kind of gifts, and others for another kind. Most congregations of the Society of Friends hold a morning and an evening meeting on the Lord's Day, and also a meeting in the middle of the week. And, without presuming to prescribe any fixed rule, I would suggest that the morning meetings on the first day of the week (Sunday) are usually occasions on which, in alternation with silent, united worship, there is a special fitness in preaching the Gospel, with its adaptations to different states and conditions.

Might not the evening or afternoon meetings on the same day, as a general rule, be profitably occupied in part, at least, with reading and expounding the Scriptures; and would it not be well, very frequently, for those who meet in the middle of the week to edify one another by many short and lively testimonies, praises, and prayers? "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it"!

Again I say, however, that everything in all meetings must be left to the guidance of the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. We must not allow ourselves to be brought into bondage by the observance or non-observance of any specific rules.

My readers, who are not members of the Society of Friends, will notice and kindly excuse the few remarks I have made in this chapter, which have a special reference to my own sect.

But I proceed now to state that the Spirit in the church is the great Unifier.

All true fellowship between individual believers--and the word implies union of heart and purpose--is the "fellowship of the Spirit." "Our fellowship," says the Apostle, "is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." And the Spirit is striving still to bring all God's children into that blessed fellowship with the Father, and with the Son, and with each other. "If we walk in the light [of the Spirit] we have fellowship one with another."

And as Christ, dwelling in the heart of the believer by faith, and strengthening him by His Spirit in the inner man, is the foundation for union and fellowship between individual Christians, so it is the Spirit abiding in

the Church that is to form the basis of union between the sects.

The doctrine of holiness is sometimes accused by its opposers of tending to divide and distract the Church of Christ. But Gospel holiness is the work of the indwelling Spirit, and surely it cannot be said of Him that He is the author of heresies, divisions, or schisms among God's people.

The Church has undergone many lamentable divisions and separations, it is true, but it was not so much because of its holiness as because it wanted more holiness.

As individual Christians and Christian sects are baptized with the Holy Ghost they are brought nearer to Christ, and, like the radii of a circle or the spokes of a wheel, as they get nearer the Center they get nearer to each other. Their union is in Christ, and in Him alone, through the Spirit.

I do not see any sufficient reason to accept the views of those who suppose that the Church of Christ on earth must, during the present dispensation, become non-denominational, i.e., that all sects of Christians must be merged into one outward and visible Church. God's chosen people of old were twelve tribes, but one Israel. In like manner His people now are many denominations, but one Church. I do not know why it should not continue to be so, until the Son of Man cometh in His kingdom.

And when the Israelites marched, or when they encamped, it was not in disorder, nor at random. Every tribe had its own place assigned in the march, in the battle, and in the encampment; and every man was to march, to fight, and to pitch his tent under his own standard, and with his own tribe. There was beauty, there was order, there was strength. But the secret of it all was that God dwelt in the tabernacle, and the tabernacle was in their very midst.

And when the prophet, covetous of Balak's gold, would fain have cursed this Israel of God, when he even changed his position again and again that he might see them from a different stand-point, if peradventure he might curse them from thence, on every occasion the curse was changed into a blessing in his mouth, and he was compelled to exclaim, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters;" nay, even to petition for himself, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

Beautiful in their encampment, terrible in their march, irresistible in their attack upon their enemies--such were the Israelites of old when the Lord dwelt among them.

And such would the Church of Christ be now, if thoroughly baptized, and filled, and abode in by the Holy Spirit. She would indeed be "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, fair to look upon." And she would be to the enemies of God and His truth "terrible as an army with banners." And the attempts, which might be made from many different stand-points, to curse her would all be in vain, so that even her enemies would be compelled to acknowledge with Balaam, "How goodly are thy tents and thy tabernacles." "Let me die the death of the righteous."

And is not the good time coming and nigh at hand? Is not the Holy Spirit indeed taking possession of the Church to a larger extent than ever before since Apostolic times? The dividing lines between different sects of Christians have hitherto been too much like high walls of separation, across which they could only shoot arrows at each other. Now they are becoming, as I trust, more like hedges, across which they can shake hands and wish each other God-speed on their heavenward journey.

Moreover, instead of spending their time and their talent, their brain-power and their learning, in controversies and persecutions, instead of waging angry and interminable wars with each other, they are beginning to see that it is no longer the province of Ephraim to vex Judah, nor of Judah to judge Ephraim, but Judah and Ephraim are to unite with each other, and with the other tribes, in smiting the common enemies of God and of Israel, and, shoulder to shoulder with one common front, they are to wage war with Amalek, the Canaanite, or the Philistine, as the case may be.

Yes, beloved, we are living in the Dispensation of the Holy Ghost. May He be received by faith to dwell in the hearts of believers, and to vivify and unify, and sanctify, and energize the Church, until Jerusalem shall indeed be a praise in the earth, and millions shall be gathered into the fold of Christ. Gird up your loins, ye servants of the living God, and run like Elijah of old. "There is a sound of abundance of rain."

Remarks

1. Christ, by the Holy Spirit, exercises His headship over the visible Church.
2. Christ, by the Holy Spirit, meets with every assembly that is gathered in His name.
3. All true worship is performed in spirit and in truth. It may be either with or without vocal exercises.
4. The Holy Spirit, if waited upon and sought unto, will rightly direct all the exercises of the worshipping assembly.
5. The gifts of the Spirit may be rightly exercised under His direction in the assembled Church.
6. The call and qualifications for the ministry of the Gospel are from God alone. But while the Church has no power nor authority to make a man a minister, it may rightly recognize the gift he has received and record him a minister.
7. The gift of the ministry may include evangelizing, teaching, and prophesying, which is speaking for exhortation, edification, or comfort.
8. The priesthood, equality, and brotherhood of believers result from the headship of Christ over His Church.
9. A one-man ministry is not taught in the Bible.
10. Women, as well as men, may be, and are, called and anointed by the Holy Ghost for the work of the ministry.
11. Preaching, praying, singing, and reading the Scriptures are all appropriate and edifying acts of public worship, when engaged in under the leadings of the Holy Spirit.
12. Christian believers who have been baptized with the Holy Ghost are brought into fellowship with the Father, and the Son, and with one another.
13. The Holy Spirit in the Church of Christ binds together the different sects of believers in the acceptance of a common salvation, and harmonizes them in a common purpose to extend the Redeemer's kingdom.

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