

The Spirit in the Church

by G. Campbell Morgan

The Holy Spirit is the Defender of the Church's faith, the Inspiration of the Church's service, and the Bond of the Church's unity.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12

Topics: "The Role of the Holy Spirit", "Unity in the Church"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in the establishment and functioning of the Church, highlighting how the Spirit unites believers into one body and empowers them for worship, prayer, and prophecy. He explains that the Holy Spirit serves as the Defender of the Church's faith, the Inspiration of its service, and the Bond of its unity, asserting that true authority in matters of faith lies with the Spirit. Morgan reflects on historical movements, such as the Reformation and the Evangelical revival, illustrating how the Spirit has been pivotal in restoring and maintaining doctrinal purity. He concludes that the Church, though appearing divided, is fundamentally one in Christ through the Holy Spirit, who sustains its life and unity.

Transcript

ON the Day of Pentecost the coming of the Spirit upon a company of waiting disciples changed them from an aggregation of units into one corporate whole, the Church of the living God. From that moment all the essentials of the Church have been maintained by His abiding therein.

By the creation of the Church a new Temple was given to the world, a new institute for praise, for prayer, and for prophecy. All these functions are fulfilled by the abiding of the Spirit in the Church. The incense of praise is offered by the inspiration of the Spirit; the intercession of prayer is maintained by the whole company of those who pray in the Holy Spirit; the work of prophecy, in its fullest meaning of forth-telling, is carried forward by such as are witnesses, in co-operation with the Holy Spirit, to the eternal verities of God.

The Letters to the Corinthians deal with New Testament Church orders; and in the first, the apostle having discussed certain disorders that had arisen in the church at Corinth, proceeded to deal with ecclesiastical matters; and, in conclusion, he revealed a threefold fact concerning the relation of the Spirit to the whole Church of God. Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren. Both in the Authorized and in the Revised Versions the word gifts is in italics. The term *spiritual gifts* covers a subject far wider than that of the gifts of the Spirit. It is undoubtedly with the gifts that the apostle specially dealt; but he opened his subject by

writing: Brethren, I would not have you ignorant concerning the matters that pertain to the Spirit. Then he made three main statements concerning these matters. First, he declared the Holy Spirit to be the Defender of the Church's faith; No man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit. In the second place, he declared the Holy Spirit to be the Inspiration of the Church's service: There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. . . . But all these worketh the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one severally even as He will. And, thirdly, he declared the Holy Spirit to be the bond of the Church's unity: For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body.

The Holy Spirit is the Defender of the Faith. No man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit. The old desire for authority in matters of faith and of doctrine is still felt, and is perfectly natural and right. It has ever been realized in the history of the Church. It may safely be said that all great crises in Church history have been the result of a division of opinion as to where the seat of authority really lies in matters of discipline and of doctrine.

The Reformation under Luther was a restoration of the lost doctrine of justification by Faith; but that, in a further analysis, is a statement of the seat of authority in the matter of forgiveness and of pardon. In that wonderful work which Luther was raised up of God to do, he called men back from seeking authoritative absolution from a man, to seek it from God.

The Oxford movement, the outworking of which in the sacerdotal revival to-day is so manifest, is a startling illustration of this fact. Newman--sweet, strong, sainted soul, from whom those who believe in the alone and undelegated authority of the Spirit radically differ in many particulars, but with whom all saints have communion still in his love for the Master--entered the Roman church because he sought for authority, and his intellect found a species of rest in what he believed to be the authority of that church.

Protestants are perpetually being told that they have no centre of authority. This statement is due to the fact that those who make it forget that the one, the abiding, and the only centre of authority, in matters of faith and doctrine, is the Holy Spirit. That is the teaching of this declaration, passed over too often as though it were simply a statement of initial matters. That it certainly is; but it is infinitely more. That Jesus is Lord is the centre of all Christian doctrine; everything else grows out of it. No man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit. All true systems of theology are but the subdivision and application to varied and varying circumstances of this central fact, that Jesus is Lord.

The same apostle stated: For to this end Christ died, and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. The Lordship of Christ is the doctrinal fact which is the centre of all others; the Lordship of Christ is the practical fact which is the issue of the doctrine. Doctrine and duty are wedded in the scheme of Christianity. Every doctrine has its expression in some duty; all creed has its out-blossoming in character.

The inner historic fact of Christianity is Christ, living, dying, rising, reigning; and the purpose of His living, dying, rising, and reigning is that He should be Lord both of the dead and of the living. The relation which the ministry of the Holy Spirit bears to that doctrine is of the closest. No man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit Who first reveals Christ to the heart of man, so that man says, in response to the revelation: Thou art my Lord. It is the work of the Spirit to take this inner, central part of Christian doctrine, and make it real to men, so that they respond to the doctrine by fulfilling the duty. That initial work having been done, it is the Spirit Who unfolds the revelation step by step,--precept upon precept; . . . --line upon line; here a little, there a little,--by so much as men are able to bear it, giving new

vision of the beauty and glory of the Master, for life and character. Every vision of Christ granted to the believer has been the result of the presence in that believer of the Holy Spirit, Who alone gives grace to say in new realms of life, in new vistas of outlook, that Jesus is Lord.

Thus, whether the look is backward upon the past of sin, He is Lord, and has blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us; or whether it is at the present condition of our hearts, He is Lord, and will have dominion over the nature until the Divine purpose be realized; or whether it is forward to the end of life, He is still Lord, and fills the horizon, so that souls, homed in His kingdom, wait for His coming; or whether it is round upon the world, lie even there is Lord, and :

Trough the ages one increasing purpose runs. And the thoughts of men are

-widened with the process of the suns,--

Widened--slowly but surely, nevertheless--to a conception of the Lordship of the Son of God.

The Holy Spirit is the one and only Defender of this Faith; and every fight for orthodoxy other than that which is aimed at bringing men to fulness of spiritual life is futile. Life in the Holy Spirit is the safeguard of purity of doctrine.

In order to emphasize this fact, consider three great landmarks in the history of the Church--the Reformation, the Evangelical revival, and the spiritual movements of to-day.

The declension that led to the Reformation, and the Reformation itself, are proofs of the fact that purity of doctrine is only maintained by the Holy Spirit. The Reformation was necessary that the truth of Justification by faith should be restated, because the Church had wandered from spiritual to material conceptions, and the Holy Spirit had been slighted and contemned. To borrow the figure of the old Hebrew prophet, men had gone to Egypt for horses upon which to fight God's battles; they had asked and obtained the patronage of the State in matters religious. Constantine had become the patron of Christianity; the Holy Spirit had been dethroned from His proper position. The result was the materializing of religious thought and character, until men had lost the doctrine of Justification by Faith, because they had lost their loyalty to the Holy Spirit. The doctrine was restored through a man to whom the Spirit gave a new vision of the lost truth. Luther declared the doctrine in the face of the world; the Spirit spoke through him; the eyes of men were opened, and there was a return to the Christian doctrine, because there was a return to the Holy Spirit.

The Evangelical revival illustrates the same thing. This was made necessary by the fact that the Church of God had lost its vision of the truth of Sanctification. John Wesley said that he had been raised up in order that he might promote Holiness throughout the land; and he declared at the beginning of that movement that if he could find one hundred men who feared nothing but sin he would move the world. God gave him his hundred men, and he did move the world. He revolutionized the thought of this country, so that to-day the spiritual results of the Methodist movement are not measured by the number of its adherents, but by the ever-increasing understanding of the doctrine of Holiness in all the Churches. John Wesley did not discover some new doctrine, save as a man may discover that which has been hidden; it was the old apostolic truth that he brought to light. It had been lost, because the Holy Spirit had neither been acknowledged as a Person nor recognized as the Centre of authority in Church life. This land had passed under the deadly blight of material conceptions of Christianity. The fox-hunting parson, who cared neither for God, man, nor devil, but only for tithes and hounds, was the representative of Christianity who cursed

the times. He was dismissed by the return of men through John Wesley and his holy club at Oxford to the truth of the sanctification of the believer through the submission of human lives to the government of the Spirit. To borrow Dr. Steele's phrase, the Conservator of orthodoxy in every successive age is the Holy Spirit.

Creeds do not ensure orthodoxy, for no individual church holds all the truth of the Church. The great body of truth is the property of the catholic Church, not of any section, nor yet of any individual member thereof. Sometimes one is asked if he hold the truth. Certainly not, for no single person can hold the truth. He may see one side of it--and that one side is almost more than he can bear--while another person sees another side. One is not to be angry with the other because neither sees all the facets of the lustrous gem, nor is the other to decline to work with the one because both do not alike include in their understanding all the angles thereof. To this man is given a vision of the individual application of the work of Christ; to another, the vision of its social application; to yet another, that of the national and international application. And the man who sees the individual aspect of that work has no right to anathematize the man who only sees the national aspect. One man feels that there is laid upon his heart the great message of a Christian doctrine and a living Christ to the nations; and he so feels the impulse of that upon him, that he must give up his work with individuals, and appeal, as much as one voice may, to the nation, from the floor of some legislative chamber. It cannot be said that such a man is not doing God's work. A man is not necessarily fulfilling the final and only work of the ministry when he is in the pulpit. Stepping from the pulpit and from the work of dealing with individual men about conversion and spiritual upbuilding would be to some a degradation of life. But if another man has another outlook, and would speak to masses of men, and to nations of the earth, about the way in which Christ would have society conducted and nations order their government, the preacher in his pulpit has no right to despise that man. Nay, to one is given one vision of Christ, and to another yet another; but no man holds all the truth, as no man has all the gifts.

In the catholic Church, by the Spirit, is contained the whole truth; and in the catholic Church, by the Spirit, is contained all the gifts necessary for the declaration thereof. The catholic Church, inspired by the Spirit, indwelt by the Spirit, is a divine institution infinitely larger than human sight can compass, human statistics declare, or human understanding perfectly comprehend.

Life in the Spirit is necessarily, therefore, the inspiration of, and the equipment for service. Attempts may be made to organize and apportion to every man his work, giving to one the individual, to another the social, and to a third the national work; and subdividing these things, it may be planned that this man shall preach the gospel of forgiveness, that man the gospel of holiness, and another the gospel of the coming Christ. For the orderly execution of these matters there may be distinctions, and degrees, and seasons, and symbols. The Spirit of God cannot, however, be crowded into small human channels and ideas. What absolute folly is evidenced by all such attempts! The catholic Church is not bounded by loose ropes of sand, it is not maintained in order by small definitions, but by the Spirit, Who is the Conservator of its orthodoxy and the Inspiration of its service. He gives His gifts severally as He will; and not along such restricted lines of communication as the laying on of hands, but through the broad river of His indwelling of the Church, come the gifts as well as the graces of God.

If the Spirit be the Defender of the Church's faith and the Inspiration of the Church's service, He is also the Bond of the Church's unity. In one Spirit were aye all baptized into one body. The Door of the Church is Jesus Christ; and reverently the figure may be carried further--the Holy Spirit guards the Door. From that Pentecostal effusion to this hour, the Holy Spirit has guarded the entrance to the Church of Christ, and admitted all its members by His own baptism. Men and women have ever passed into the catholic Church

by the one Door, and entrance has ever been by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, apart from which it is impossible for any soul to come into living union with Christ, the Head of the Church. Consequently, the whole company of those who are in the Church are energized and impelled by the same Spirit. There is one body and one Spirit--one body, as the human body is one. having different members, each with its own function, but only one life. The hand has not a separate existence from the foot, but each has the one life; so, in the catholic Church, there are many members having varying functions, but all are impelled by the one life.

The Holy Spirit is the life of the catholic Church, and in that life lies the great bond of its union. The Church is one and undivided. To all outward seeming it is divided, and each division arrogates to itself the name of the Church, until at last one most carefully separated division declares that all the rest are systems and sects, and it alone gives outward revelation of what the true Church is.

The fact is that men do not know the bounds of the catholic Church, which is smaller than the records of the churches show., and is yet greater than them all. There are living members of that Church in all the churches, and it may be that on the rolls of the churches are names which are not on the roll of the catholic Church. Those are members thereof who are baptized into union with Christ by the Holy Spirit. The Lord knows them; and being members of His one Church, they can sing the words of Baring-Gould's hymn in a far higher sense than some people imagine:--

We are not divided;

All one body we,

One in hope and doctrine,

One in eharity.

It may be objected that the Church is not one in doctrine. The catholic Church is one in doctrine, and this is its central word: Jesus is Lord. Whether men express that truth to swing of censer and swell of music, or to the beat of the drum and the blare of the trumpet, or without any of these accompaniments, matters far less than is imagined.

The life of the Church came, not by the will of man, nor by a ceremony of human invention, but by the baptism of the Spirit; and the great unity of that Church is still maintained by the indwelling of all its members by the Holy Spirit. The true consciousness of this unity of the Spirit, is the love concerning which Paul wrote, and which finds its manifestation toward the unit and the aggregate of units which make up the whole. The unity of the Church can only be realized in full spiritual life. Acts of Uniformity cannot make the Church one: that is the original and continuous work of the Spirit. Of that one great Church of Christ some of its members are at home with the Lord, some are passing through the earth, and some are coming up out of to-morrow; and the Spirit is the Keeper of the unity, which cannot be broken. Presently out of all the seeming disagreement and disruption will come the glorious Church of the First-born, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

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