

Power or True Religion

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon emphasizes the essential balance between the outward form of religion and the inward power of God in true Christianity.

Duration: 1:02:14

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:8, 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, Ephesians 2:5, Ephesians 3:16-19, Philipians 4:12-13

Topics: "True Religion"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the ninefold fruit of the Spirit as described by Paul. They highlight the complexity of this fruit, which consists of nine different characteristics. The sermon also references a document called 'Revolution by Stealth,' which outlines the objectives of atheistic communism in the Western world. The speaker then transitions to discussing the power of God, using the example of snowfall and the transformation it brings. They emphasize that God's power is at work in every person who bears the name of Jesus. The sermon includes readings from 2 Corinthians, focusing on the concept of God's power in us and the abundance of grace that God provides for every good work.

Transcript

A few weeks ago we were meditating on Paul's words recorded in 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 5, where he refers to people having a form of godliness or of religion, a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. We spent a little time with that, considering the two sides of religion that the Apostle Paul refers to there, namely the outward form and the inner power. Every religion, every kind of religion, will have these two aspects, the external, the visible on the one hand, and then the internal, the subjective, the invisible.

There is a sense in which every religion has something akin to a body and a soul. Moreover, Christianity also shares with other religions the tragic possibility that some of its professing devotees, some of its professing followers, may get a little mixed up between the externalities, the things that are visible and obvious, and the things that are never really seen, but are within the heart, invisible, in the realm of the spirit. There are many people who think of Christianity only in terms of deeds, of actions.

Now, Christianity necessarily does produce a certain kind of living, certain activities, certain behavior, but there is much more to it than that. Christianity properly so-called first and foremost deals with a man on the inside, and having dealt radically with a person on the inside, in the depth of the heart, the innermost change of soul goes on to produce an entirely different mode of behavior. The one without the other is unacceptable, according to the New Testament.

And so, if ever you meet a Christian who is only concerned with observing certain statutes, certain laws, doing the right things externally, visibly, before men, and laying little concern, having little concern for something deeper, something inward, something personal, then you may be sure that that person is not walking in the full glare of New Testament light, to say the least. Christianity properly so-called requires both form and force, pattern of living and power to live. And those who truly represent the Christian faith in any age have both of these, not either or, but both and.

There is a pattern of life that is emerging for everybody to see, but behind the pattern of life there is the power of God in the soul. And provided the power of God is in the soul, sooner or later the pattern of living will emerge. It takes some time.

God works in a mysterious way his wonders to perform, and he does not always shout and tell us and announce that he's on the scene, as we've seen the snow going again in recent times, how quickly it's gone. We've seen three or four feet of snow going down to I guess about eight inches by now in our back garden. There was no one there to herald, we didn't hear the sound of a trumpet, the Almighty saying here I'm snow clearing.

But oh the power of it, the unseen invisible silence of God about his almighty work, and you and I will see the transformation proceeding as spring follows winter and new life comes. Where we a few weeks ago thought of nothing but death, form and power. Now we've considered something about this power as well as the form.

We indicated that there are perhaps three aspects to this power in the life of a Christian. First of all Christianity involves power over us. This of course is why so many people reject the Christian faith, because they realize from the beginning that if you receive the Christian faith, if you receive Christ, then you're not your own master.

And they rightly conceive that, it is true. You cannot be your own master, your own boss, if Jesus Christ is your Savior. You can't do just as you please.

There is a surrender of oneself to one who is going to save us and change us and make us fit for God's presence as well as for life in this world. But not only is this power power over us, we come tonight to consider the power of God as in us, in us. This is a very wonderful subject, even if I can't even express a fraction of the wonder of it.

I think this is one of the most wonderful facets of the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Wherever there is a man or a woman of God, wherever there is a Christian, you and I, we must know something about not the power of God in the universe outside of us there, but in here. Christianity is the power of God unto salvation.

In one sense that salvation was finished at the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, objectively it was provided. But as far as its application to us is concerned, individually, it's an ongoing work of God. God is at work in every man and every woman that bears the name of Jesus.

And that's the subject before us tonight. Now it's at this point I want to introduce a short series of readings, very short, but they're all on this subject, all on this aspect of things. And so you will cut this out from the time of the sermon, won't you? Now I want to quote, I want to read a few passages from 2 Corinthians in the first place, if you'd like to follow them or listen to me as I read them, just as you please.

I want to read first of all from 2 Corinthians chapter 9 and verse 8. And would you please, if you're listening, just try and think of the concept of God's power in us. That's the thing that comes through. Says Paul to the Corinthians, God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound to every good work.

Move forward in 2 Corinthians to chapter 10 verses 4 and 5. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, says Paul, they are, they have divine power. Divine power to demolish strongholds.

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. And we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. Move again to 2 Corinthians chapter 12 verses 9 and 10.

He said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, says Paul, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest upon me. That is why for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties.

For when I am weak, then I am strong. Turn over the pages to Ephesians chapter 1 verses 18 to 20. I pray also, says Paul, that you may know his incomparably great power for us who believe.

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ, when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms. Turn over the page again to Ephesians chapter 3 verses 16 to 19. I pray, says the apostle, that out of his glorious riches, he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work in us. To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.

Next Philippians 4 verses 12 and 13. I have learned, says Paul, the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

And last but not least, 1 John chapter 4 and verse 4. You dear children are from God, and have overcome them, because the one who is in you, is greater than the one who is in the world. Now I think the thread is evident, isn't it? In every scripture we have culled and quoted, you find this one amazing thread, and there are many many other passages that we could have quoted, all depicting something of the power of God in Christ, and then as having first been embodied in the life of the Lord Jesus, now manifestly exhibited in the life of his people. Now that brings me then, first of all, to the power of true religion, as it is exhibited first in the commencement of the Christian life, and then secondly in the continuance of the Christian life.

We must say a word about this first. The power of God, the power of true religion, the power of the gospel, as it is exhibited in the commencement of the Christian life in any individual person, the beginnings of Christian experience. Now true religion, albeit engaging the mind, the conscience, the will, and the heart, is infinitely more than the sum total of their combined contribution.

I may think deeply, I may feel deeply, I may will to do certain things, and with all my heart, but true religion is more than all those four things combined. Wherever you find true religion, according to the scriptures, God is at work. The power of God is there.

He started something, and he's continuing it, and this is the Christian life. It's something God has begun, it's something God is continuing, and it is something that one day God is going to consummate. And because God is at the beginning of it, God is at the continuance of it, we can be sure that it'll be consummated.

If you started it, if I started it, well I couldn't continue it. And I couldn't assure anyone that you'll arrive at what the Bible promises, but if God began it, and if God is continuing it, I can assure you, as he assures you in his word, that you will reach the end of your journey, because God is in it. Now, how does the power of God express itself at the beginnings of a Christian experience? Well now, first of all, think of the power that produces regeneration.

Now that may be a new term to some people here tonight, I don't know. Regeneration means bringing to life, quickening something. Jesus declared that in order to enter the realm of which he is king, the realm of salvation, in order to enter the realm of salvation, it is necessary for a person, for every person, to be born again.

Now this is a staggering statement really. If it were to come from someone else, well we might not take all that in notice of it. But it's the Son of God, it's the one who died on the cross, it's the one who rose again, it's the one who ascended and sent forth the Holy Spirit, it's the Jesus of history.

It is he who said it. And you see, because he says it, he must be taken seriously, because of the person he is. And he told Nicodemus of old, he says, I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

He just doesn't see it, let alone be inside it. Now being born again is nothing less than a spiritual resurrection. Or if you like, a resurrection of the spirit of a person.

It's not so much the making of a new start in life, as having a new life in order to start anew. Regeneration is this, it's possessing a new life and because I have the new life, I'm starting all anew. Life is new, I start afresh.

It's not my starting without the new life, it's the new life having come within me and because it is here, because it is mine, I just have to be different. And the difference emerges not because I will to be different, but because this life that I've had makes me different. Paul makes that abundantly very clear when he reminds the Ephesian Christians of the beginning of their Christian experience, he puts it like this.

Now these are very familiar scriptures to some of you. Now you bear with me, we must notice the wonder of this. Ephesians 2 5, because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, listen, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in sins.

What is regeneration? What does it mean to be born again? It means, my friend, to be raised from the dead. Not physically now in the first place, because we may be physically very much alive, but the spiritual part of us is dead and there is a quickening that takes place and as Jesus physically rose from the dead, so we spiritually come out of our graves and there is a newness of life that follows. Paul says substantially the same thing to the Colossians, reminding them of how they became Christian.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God who made you alive. Colossians 2 11. Now the implication of the verb employed in each passage means the giving of life to the dead.

You see many people who are not Christian don't realize what's wrong with them, they don't realize that they're dead. I didn't and I was very proud of myself, but I didn't know I was dead, spiritually dead and I attributed the problems of my life to this and the other, not realizing that the problems arose largely because I was spiritually dead and God was distant or God appeared dead, not because he was dead, but because I was dead. He was not dead to me, but I was dead to him.

He was there, he was speaking, he was acting, he was sustaining me, he was giving me breath to breathe, but I was dead to all that. And so were you Christians here tonight, every one of you, all of us, that's our condition by nature. Regeneration is this, you see, it's God breathing upon us his Holy Spirit and there's a newborn babe and life comes to the dead.

So if any man is in Christ there is a new creature or a new creation. It's bringing life to the dead and that of course is an act of God, whether it happens on the spirit of a man or whether it happens on the body of a man, it makes no difference. It's a divine work and so you can't stop talking about it and it's made you a new creature.

If it were a superficial experience you could forget about it and shed it and get away from it, but not this. When this has taken place, your life has. But the thing I'm stressing is this, you see, I can't do that for you, you can't do that for yourself, your elders can't do that for you, your bishop can't do that for you, your archbishop can't do that for you, your pope can't do that for you.

I'm not speaking disrespectfully of anybody, but you bring the whole host of ecclesiastical leaders, prophets and priests together and bind them together in council and get them to breathe upon you and you're still as dead at the beginning as you were at the end as you were at the beginning. They can't do it, but a breath of God quickens the dead and there's a new creature. Now that's what regeneration is, that's what it is to be born again.

And you know you're not the man you were, neither of course are you the man you will be, because you will develop and you will grow, but you're not the man you were, you're not the man you will be, but you are a new creature. You see, only God can do that. If I'm speaking to anyone tonight who has a sense of need of that and you know you haven't got it and you need it, well now the thing to do is not talk to me or talk to anybody else, pray to God to breathe his spirit upon you and give it to you.

That's the right thing to do, because he's the donor, he's the originator, no one else can do it. In the last resort you must seek it from the divine donor himself. Now let me hurry from that, the power of God in regeneration to this, the power that imparts divine life to human beings.

It's another side or virtually this continuation of what we've said already. You know when the Lord Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus, he said this to him, he said, flesh gives birth only to flesh, but the spirit gives birth to spirit. If you're a father or a mother and you have a child, you are in a sense responsible under God by the gifts God gives.

You are responsible for bringing that new life into the world, father and mother, under the blessing of God. But what you bring into the world is only from your part, is just flesh. In order for that little one to

experience regeneration, there must be another person involved.

And you can't do that, you can pray for it, you can teach the child the way to seek it, you can exhibit before the child the glory of it. But that which is born of the flesh is only flesh, and he who is born of the flesh only can only do that. But that which is born of the spirit, when the spirit comes and he quickens and he acts upon us, he imparts life, not just new life, but divine life.

This is the thing I wanted to stress here. Not natural life, titivated a little, but the very life of God. One of the old fathers wrote a book on the life of God in the soul of man.

If you see it, I'd suggest to you it's worth selling something to get it, it's very good. The life of God in the soul of man. You see, what makes a person a Christian is this, that he is given eternal life.

What is eternal life? Well, eternal life is not just a gift from God that only God can give, it is the gift of God. God gives himself. It is the fruit not only from the spirit, but of the spirit.

Galatians 5. What do you mean? Well, you see, when God gives you eternal life, he doesn't just kind of give you a parcel as I would give you this book, let it represent a Christmas present or a birthday present, and God gives something that is not himself. Not that. But the wonder of the regeneration of rebirth and of becoming a Christian is this, God gives himself to you.

Not in the sense in which you receive a wife or a husband when you get married and you receive someone to live alongside of you. That would be very wonderful. But God gives himself in the sense of giving you the very spirit which is himself, and he breathes his own spirit into you, his own nature into you, his own life into you.

When we speak about the Holy Spirit of God in the soul of man, men and women, brothers and sisters, it means this. God comes into our very bodies to dwell. It's divinity imparted insofar as that is possible.

Now, please don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that when a man is born again he's become a little God. He hasn't even become an angel necessarily.

But what I am saying is this, that the nature of the life that is communicated to us is the same as the life of God himself. It is insofar as the life of God is communicable, it is God's life given to a creature. The measure in which a creature can possess the life of the Creator is in itself something to boggle our minds.

But insofar as God can communicate his life to a creature, that's what regeneration is. That's what it is to be born again. We share somehow in his life, and he lives in us, and we have eternal life.

Now you see, that's only got to be said for us to realize we can't do that for ourselves. You can't beget yourself, can you? You must be born again. Crazy! How can I? How can I bring myself to birth? It's the one thing I had nothing to do with, because my father and mother had everything to do with it.

I couldn't do anything. I was passive. God does that.

It's an act of God. It's the power of God. It's the grace of God.

It's the mercy of God. Brothers and sisters, I think you and I need to get the concept of this. I'll tell you one reason we need it.

It's to pray for the salvation of the lost. You see, when our friends go out on the visitation evangelism on a Tuesday evening or at other times, you know, it's not really a matter of pitting wit against wit, genius against genius, man against man, woman against woman. Get the people who can, who can talk this.

It's not that at all. But it is this. It is going with God so that God may use us and through us and by our words and prayers breathe his Holy Spirit upon the dead and bring the dead from their graves to newness of life.

It is God who does this. And if you and I are pinning our hopes on a preacher or an evangelist or the visitation people on the Tuesday night, brothers and sisters, we're up the wrong tree. It must be God.

And that's why every man and woman in the church is a part in it. Only God can do it. I can't go into a physical cemetery and call a man from the dead.

Neither can you. Neither can we do it spiritually. It must be God.

But now that's not all. The power of true religion in its commencement involves a spiritual miracle. A miracle in the sense that humanly speaking it is impossible.

How can a drunkard, how can a selfish, arrogant, self-centered person leave his self-centeredness and begin to look out and love other people and want to serve them? It's just not practicable. How can people who come to the Lord Jesus Christ and they're absolute slaves to their passions, how can you expect them to be anything else? Only because they've come to the Lord and He is able. It's a miracle.

He does it. He does it. And if He doesn't do it, it doesn't happen.

But now it doesn't end there. The power of true religion in the continuance of that progress. However great the almighty power whereby fallen man is regenerated, it's no whit greater than that by which the newborn soul is nurtured and enabled to grow, to quote Paul, toward the stature of the fullness of Christ.

The energy that sustains a regenerate believer in an unregenerate world, and not only protects him from evil but perfects him in righteousness, is not only infinite, it is divine. And nothing less accounts for the ongoing life of every Christian man and woman in this hostile world in which we live. Now I can of course only refer to some things very superficially tonight.

And I'm dealing with a subject which is vast enough to keep us here for the rest of 1985. You will appreciate that. But I'm just going to take two things.

First of all, the power that produces in us the fruit that God requires. And I can't say more than one or two things about that. God expects fruit in the life of men and women.

He expects something from you, my friend. I don't mind where you're sitting tonight. It doesn't matter who you are.

You may never have been here before. It doesn't matter. But I want to tell you tonight, if you've never heard it before, the Almighty God expects something from you.

And you'll be answerable for that when you meet Him. He's expecting something. In His people, He is expecting a special kind of fruit.

In all the regenerate, there is fruit that He's expecting. Now He's not like Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, who expected the Israelites to produce bricks without giving them straw. When God expects us to make bricks, He gives us the straw.

When He expects us to produce something, He gives us the raw material. He gives us the ability. He gives us the capacity.

And He's done that in the regeneration, basically. And He will continue to give all that we need as we go on through life, depending upon Him and drawing from Him. This is really the life of faith.

A life of faith is a life of dependence upon God and drawing from God. And it means both. Not one or the other, but both hands.

Depending upon God in all the circumstances of life and of death and drawing from Him. Looking to Him, drawing from Him. And as we do so, we find that we can say when I'm weak, then I'm strong.

Now, let me just deal with this for a moment. First of all, the power that produces the fruit that God requires. Jesus said, it's by their fruits you will recognize them.

That is false teachers. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Likewise, and now here is the general principle. Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

Again, you did not choose me, He says, but I chose you to go and bear fruit. Fruit that will last. And listen to this.

Contrasting the kind of fruit that is born by our natural, unregenerate natures and the fruit of the Spirit when He comes into us. Listen to Paul. The acts of a sinful nature in us are obvious.

Sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you, he says, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. Now, but the fruit of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Against such things there is no law. You can't go wrong in this way, says the Apostle Paul. You can't transgress when you're cultivating the fruit of the Spirit.

You can do as much and as much and as much as you desire. You'll never do too much. You'll never go too far.

There's no law against these. Now, what have we got here? The production of the kind of fruit which God requires in his people is very difficult. In fact, it is naturally impossible, and that for at least two reasons.

In the first place, it is naturally impossible because of the nature of the soil and of the atmosphere in which we are expected to produce this fruit. To borrow from the language of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the parable of the sower, the seed, and the soil, the soil of life in this world, the soil of our human society, is like a rock. It's hard.

It's like trying to sow seed on a very rocky place, and this is what it's like to preach the gospel of the kingdom in this world. It's like trying to sow on a rock, and what do you expect? You can't have a garden

on a rock. Seed doesn't penetrate the rock, you see.

And then not only that, he says, where there is a little bit of a layer of earth, or where there is good earth apparently, in that apparently good earth, reasonably good earth, as it appears to you, there are thorns, and there are thistles growing, and their roots have become entangled with the soil, so that if any of the seed falls into that kind of soil and begins to grow, the thistles and the thorns will choke the good seed. It just can't grow in it. Now that's Jesus' way of describing the society in which we are to bring forth fruit.

It's impossible. Either it's too rock, or the things that grow and thrive in this world will choke the spiritual life in us. It's impossible to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in this world, humanly speaking.

Or, in the words of Paul, the natural produce of the soul is altogether contrary to the produce of the Spirit. They're contrary one to the other, they're contrary, they're altogether different, and they just don't go on together. Naturally, we produce what Paul speaks of as the works of the flesh, to which we've already referred.

But moreover, the climate is sometimes so excessively hot, to refer back again to Jesus' parable, the climate is so excessively hot that when apparently we are beginning to bear spiritual fruit that is acceptable to God, it gets so hot that the little fruiting that is appearing, it withers and it dies. Over and above that, however, there is the unique nature of the fruit itself. The fruit that God expects of us as people is of such an order, of such a nature, that humanly speaking, it is impossible to produce it in this world.

The fruit which God requires is utterly divine in nature. God requires us to produce fruit which really can only be produced within the deity, in heaven, the fruit of the Spirit. It's only God produces it, and it'll only emerge in its fullness, in its perfection, where God is.

It belongs to God, it's a quality of the Godhead and the life of the Godhead. How can you produce that in a world like this? And it's very complex. As Paul gives it to us here, it's ninefold.

It's not just one simple fruit, it's ninefold. There are nine several aspects to it. It's the one fruit with nine characteristics.

Thinking of the antipathy of our contemporary society and civilization to this kind of fruit, I'm reminded of a document which allegedly came into the hands of the field director of the American Security Council in the 60s. Some of you may have read about it. It was entitled Revolution by Stealth, and it listed the objectives of atheistic communism in our western world, objectives that were to be achieved by peaceful means without lifting a hand or firing a gun.

And some of them were as follows, I quote, one, break down cultural standards of morality by promoting pornography and obscenity in books, in magazines, motion pictures, radio, and TV. Two, eliminate all laws governing obscenity by calling them censorship. That's a bad word.

And, quote, a violation of free speech and of free press, unquote. Three, discredit the family as an institution. Encourage promiscuity and easy divorce.

Four, gain control of key positions on radio, television, and motion pictures. Five, present homosexuality, degeneracy, and promiscuity as, quote, normal, unquote. Again, quote, natural and healthy, unquote.

And that's the world in which we live. That's the secular, humanistic world in which we live. This is the kind of philosophy that is really abroad in our society tonight.

Nothing is really wrong, you see, provided you don't hurt anybody, and nobody is hurt. And yet, my friends, the miracle of which I'm speaking is happening. God is producing righteousness and holiness and love and the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of men and women in all kinds of pagan societies.

That's the marvel of it. Such is the power of God that this is going on. You know, I hesitate to give you this illustration, but I will do it.

I was visiting my native heath and my native county not all that long ago. Oh yes, it is a few years ago. Yes, it is.

And I was being shown some of the modernization in farming by a great friend of mine. And they had a farm, a dairy farm, boasting, I don't quite remember, was it a few over 200 or a few under, under or over, milking cows. And he was very proud of it.

200 milking cows. That means there were many more than 200 around there, but they were not, they were not being milked at the time. And I remember one of the things that struck me as he was going through this.

It was, he was telling me that he took me into what he called the, the milking parlor. Now in my day, I was a cowshed. But you know, in the meantime, the cowshed had vanished and it was a milking parlor.

And these 200 cows came into the milking parlor at milking time. I'm not going to try to describe to you some of the things that happened when the cows got into their parlor. But they left behind them an awful lot of mess and an awful stench.

And then he told me how they cleaned up. And I have never seen a place look so spic and span. You could almost, when they had done their cleaning job, you could almost eat your breakfast on the floor.

The offal and the dung was taken nearly a mile away. He didn't know what it was about. But you know what got me? There was a lot of dirty slush that went down a drain.

And a little time later, I was taking a walk to a spot that I loved as a boy. I used to catch little fish there, even tadpoles. It's a beautiful little stream.

I don't know whether it's right to call it a river or not. It was a lovely quiet spot. And lo and behold, I saw this awful dirty slush that had gone into this crater in the cows parlor.

I saw that it had come underground somewhere down into the river stream. And all the smell of the cowshed and whatnot had got into the stream and putrefied it. And I saw a spectacle I shall never see before.

When I was about to turn my back upon the ugly spectacle and its smell, I suddenly saw it. There was a kind of island in the middle of the river, small of course, miniature little island, just as you, you know, Spadina goes down and it goes around this place that used to be Knox College. The road divides there.

Well, now the stream divided like that. And in the middle, there was a clump of trees, a number of trees, and then some rocks or stones, and a lot of this slush had got gathered among it. All the dirt and all the

smell was there.

And the spectacle that faced me was the most beautiful crowd of water lilies that I've ever seen in my life. Talk about whiteness, talk about white, talk about beauty. Out of the awful stench, out of the muck, out of the mire in that most incongruous situation that had been transformed over the years, here they were as if they were greeting a long-lost friend, and they could never be more beautiful.

And I thought, thank you, Lord. It's true. Some of your whitest lilies grow on dunghills.

From ancient Corinth and Rome and Ephesus to modern Toronto and New York and London and Edinburgh and Glasgow and any other city, God brings forth beauty and character and the fruit of the Spirit in the most inhospitable environment. I ask you, how is it possible? I'll tell you. It's the power of God.

You don't hear Him, and we stupidly conclude that He's not at work, because there's no noise. But God is at work. And when God is at work, you and I can expect anything of this high and lofty character, the power that produces the fruit that God requires.

I'm concluding, and I'm only going to refer to what I, what else I have to say. Can I take out just one of these ninefold fruits of the Spirit and ask you to think about it, in order to say what a remarkable thing it is. One of the ninefold fruits of the Spirit is self-control.

Self-control. God has power that He gives us to control oneself in order to fulfill His purposes. And there is only one who can give us control of ourselves in order to do and be what God requires of us, and that's God Himself.

That's why the New Testament is full of this. You read it, read it in Peter. I have some quotations here, at least four coming from the first epistle of Peter and another very major quotation from his second epistle, others from Paul.

Everybody has to be self-controlled according to Paul in Titus and Timothy. Old men, old women, young men, young women, elders, deacons, everybody has to be self-controlled if they're to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus. How can you and I be self-controlled? The difficulty of the exercises is incredible.

Think of the external provocations that tend to indiscipline. Somebody loves you or hates you, and it doesn't matter which, you know. Some people go to pieces morally when someone tells them, I love you, and all the guards are down.

And things happen which bring shame and trouble, just because someone has professed love, and they've gone suddenly out of control. But sometimes somebody says, I hate you. Same thing happens, right out of control.

Temper, words, actions, deeds, you know what happens? Right out of control. Everything's wrong. The bulls come in charging into the kitchen.

We're so easily out of control. Pleasure and pain, success or failure, friend or foe, can excite us to intemperance in word and emotion and action. And then think of the internal propensities that there are here to keep under control.

The thoughts. There is a word in the book of Proverbs and the Hebrews. The Hebrew translation can very well be translated in this way.

It can be translated in another way too. But this is a legitimate way, as in the King James. As a man thinketh in his heart, so he is.

What am I? Oh, you say, you're the senior minister of Knox. We respect you and so forth. Well, I trust I'm worthy of that.

But, my friends, you don't know what I am. I am what I'm thinking in here. It's only God and myself knows what's going on in here.

And it's true about you. You're not what you appear from the suits you wear, nor the faces and smiles that you bear. Neither am I. You are what you think.

Your thoughts determine you. Your thoughts, your innermost thoughts, both forecast and cast your character. Think of the affections.

Thinking is the activity of the mind in relation to ideas or facts. Such thoughts do not necessarily imply either the attraction or repulsion which we may experience by the facts about which we think. The affections are responsible for that.

They are aroused by what we think, and are aroused in terms of pleasure or pain. Our affections feel for us, and they give evident expression to the way we think. Our affections come to life, and we react, you see, to what we're thinking about.

Paul summoned the Colossians to set their hearts, their affections, not on the things here on earth, but on the things above, where Christ is seated. Get your affections, get your thoughts high enough, he says, and see that they go as high as the place where your Savior lives and reigns. That's the place for your thoughts and your heart.

Think of your moods. How easily they got out of control. Even a great man like Elijah.

You remember Elijah on Mount Carmel? Even a man like Elijah, under a tree crying to the Lord, Lord, he says, I'm alone in this world. There's nobody with me. Take away my life.

Take away my life. I want to die. A man of God, a prophet with a death wish coming over his lips.

Dear Elijah. Oh, well, God was gracious. He knew what he needed, and he gave him a very good sleep, and a meal, and one or two other things, and a little bit of counsel, and dear old Elijah was revived again.

But you see, his moods became such that he really wanted to die. You like that? Self-control. Thoughts, emotions, moods, passions, desires, passions.

Ah, I don't need to go any further. Nevertheless, the Lord expects this of his people, that we should be controlled. Self-control is the fruit of the Spirit.

In other words, the Holy Spirit of God in us gives us the capacity to keep these things under control. We can't do it. It's devastating to tell me in my own native human nature, look, this is expected of you.

No, no, but God says, I give you my Holy Spirit. I've given you my word. I give you the fellowship of the saints, and I give you liberty to come to my throne every day for anything you need.

Now, he says, get on with the job, and I'm expecting it of you. I'm drawing to a close. Thank you for your listening.

It's not, it's not without reason. It's not without wisdom. Before our Lord Jesus Christ ascended, following the completion of his work on the cross and in the resurrection, he told his disciples, I said, you tarry in Jerusalem until you be endued with from on high.

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be witnesses to me wherever you are, in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. Now, please notice, please notice, just a few weeks previously, these men have been witnesses against Jesus. You say, I never heard that before.

Well, I hope you've read the New Testament. Then you will have read it, even if you didn't hear it. Peter witnessed against him three times, verbally, and says, I don't know the man.

The rest of the disciples didn't do that, but they ran away from him, and when you run away from somebody who you have previously acknowledged to be son of God, Messiah, when you run away from him, you tacitly say he's not worthy to cling to him in dangerous times. Isn't that a denial of him? Whether for fear or whatever the reason was, I can't go into the details at the moment, but they ran away from him, and they virtually said, he's not worthy, that we should die for him. They witnessed against him, but Jesus said that by the coming of the Holy Spirit, they would receive and experience such power as would transform them, and thereafter, he says, you will be witnesses unto me, not just for me.

Now, it's much easier to witness for Jesus than to be a witness to him. You see, to be a witness for him, I can say the truth that I know about him, but to be a witness to him means this, that the mode of my life and living, the mode of my life and living, gives credibility to the claims of the Lord Jesus, and in the light of the kind of life that I'm now living, men can honestly believe that he is the Son of God, the Messiah that was promised, the prophet, the priest, and the king, because of the change he's made in me, and to be witnesses unto him means nothing less than that. And nothing less than that lay behind the emergence of the Jerusalem church, a church in the very citadel where his chiefest enemies were, those who crucified him, guarded by the Romans in Jerusalem, in Jerusalem, where Jesus was slaughtered on the tree in Jerusalem, the first church emerged.

How on earth was that possible? Oh, my friend, for one reason, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. God was able to persuade the men that nailed him to the tree, or sent him there, or witnessed against him, that he was indeed the Son of God, the only Savior of men, and under that persuasion of God, they turned around, they were born again, and the church came into being. That's the story of the church down the century.

Jerusalem, Samaria, Judea, to the uttermost parts of the earth, to the Roman Empire, down the centuries, into Europe, from Asia, right down to the American continent. How has it happened? Oh, my friends, it's the ongoing power of God. There's no explanation other than that.

And every Christian man and woman here tonight is the product of the power of God, and if you don't know it, I beg of you, I beg of you for your soul's salvation, cry to him tonight. Don't be satisfied with a

mere form of religion, whether it's Protestant or Catholic or what, whether it's this or that, don't be satisfied with a shell. Get the power, get the power.

There is power, there is power in the Christ who died and rose again and lives forevermore, and in the Spirit whom he sent his other self, his alter ego, to take charge of the lost, to transform them and shepherd them home, to follow Mr. McLeod's language this morning, to be the good shepherd and to lead us through the wilderness until at last we come into the everlasting fold from which there will be no more going out. Is he your Savior? Are you experiencing the power of God? I trust and pray that you are. If you're not, don't be satisfied with anything less.

Don't be satisfied with mere form. Plead, cry, labor, do anything before God to seek the power of it, for that's what the Christian faith properly so called is. It's God coming to live, not just among us, but in us.

Let us pray. God our Father, we are such feeble exponents of your gospel. No voice, no tongue, no pair of lips can ever conceivably possibly communicate all the glories and the wonders of your grace, and we so well understand the sentiments of your servant Wesley of old when he cried for a thousand tongues wherewith to sing your immortal praise.

But we the more depend upon you by the Holy Spirit, therefore, to apply to our lives the truth which is yours, so that an evening service such as this, though the church is not packed, though all our members are not here for one reason or another, though there are not many visitors among us maybe, however many, however few we may be, blessed be your name, you are still the God of power and the God of grace, and out of this you can cause great things to come. Oh God of power, hear us now, save us to the uttermost through Jesus Christ and by your Holy Spirit. We ask it in the Savior's name.

Amen.

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