

Do We Believe in the Holy Ghost?

by Samuel Chadwick

Samuel Chadwick's sermon explores the vital importance of the Holy Spirit in the Church and the detrimental effects of His neglect in modern Christianity.

Scripture: John 14:26, John 16:13, Acts 1:8, Acts 2:4, Romans 8:26, 1 Corinthians 2:10, 1 Corinthians 12:7, Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 5:18, Titus 3:5

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Christian Revival"

Description

Samuel Chadwick emphasizes the importance of the Holy Spirit in the Christian faith, noting the neglect of this doctrine throughout history. He highlights the Holy Spirit as the ultimate force in Redemption, the revealer of truth, and the instrument of grace in salvation. Chadwick warns about the consequences of neglecting the Spirit's ministry and mission, leading to confusion, impotence, and the Church's inability to address modern needs. He stresses that the Church's problems cannot be solved by mere discussions but require a return to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

The Apostles' Creed contains ten articles on the Person and Work of Christ, and only one on the Holy Spirit. The proportion of ten to one about represents the interest in the doctrine of the Spirit in the history of Christian thought. No doctrine of the Christian faith has been so neglected. Sermons and hymns are singularly barren on this subject, and the last great book on the Spirit was written in 1674. This is all the more remarkable when we remember that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate fact of Revelation and the unique force in Redemption. No other religion has anything corresponding to the Christian doctrine of the Spirit, and in the Christian religion there is nothing so vital, pervasive, and effective. John Owen speaks of it as the touchstone of faith; the one article by which the Church stands or falls. Thomas Arnold said it is "the very main thing of all. We are living under the dispensation of the Spirit; in that character God now reveals Himself to His people. He who does not know God the Holy Ghost cannot know God at all."

The Holy Scriptures declare Him to be the revealer of all truth, the active agent in all works of redemption, and from first to last the instrument of Grace in the experience of salvation. In Him, and through Him, and by Him, is the power that saves. Illumination and Conviction, Repentance and Regeneration, Assurance and Sanctification, are all the work of God the eternal Spirit. To the Church He is the Source and Supply of wisdom and power. The Church is the Body of Christ, indwelt and controlled by the Spirit. He directs, energizes, and controls. From first to last this Dispensation is the Dispensation of the Spirit.

The Fruit of Neglect

The Church affirms its faith in the Holy Ghost every time it repeats its Creed, but does the Church really believe its belief? Modern writers are contending that the name is nothing more than a figure of speech for spiritual atmosphere. They regard it as one of the misfortunes of the Christian religion that Personality has been claimed for the Spirit. The life of the Church witnesses to the same attitude. The things of the Spirit are ignored as of no account. Atmosphere is valued. Religious assemblies of a certain order give a large place to silent pauses which produce emotional excitement. When our fathers glowed with fires kindled in the soul, they gave vent in noise. The modern way is to be still. Spirituality and silence are as wedded as were revivalism and rowdiness. Both types are emotional, but revivalists did believe their work was of the Spirit; the Quietists cultivate psychological influence. They speak of the Spirit with a different content from that of the Creeds.

The blunders and disasters of the Church are largely, if not entirely, accounted for by the neglect of the Spirit's Ministry and Mission. The morass of speculation about the Bible takes no account of the Holy Spirit. It regards inspiration as negligible, and insists upon interpreting Revealed Truth by no standards save those of history and literature. Miracles are condemned without trial. Prophecy is dismissed without inquiry. Revelation is ignored without reason. Under the plea of breadth, all truth is thrust into uniform ruts. Our Lord spoke of the Spirit as the Spirit of Truth, and promised that He would guide His people into all Truth. He spake by the Prophets. There were many writers, but He is the Author, and the Bible can neither be accounted for nor interpreted but by His guidance, He holds the key; He is the Key. Revealed Truth can be known only through the Revealer, Ignoring this. scholars and historians, grammarians and antiquarians, critics and agnostics, are blind in the midst of light. The same result is seen in the belief about our Lord Jesus Christ, the Experience of Grace, and the Doctrine of the Church. No man can say Jesus is Lord save by the Holy Ghost, but men are seeking to interpret the Christ in terms of reason, history, and philosophy. The Christian religion begins in a New Birth in the power of the Spirit. It is developed under His guidance, and sustained by His presence; but ignoring the Spirit, it becomes a matter of education and evolution. The Church is the Body of Christ begotten, unified, and indwelt by the Spirit, but forgetting the Spirit, men wrangle over limbs, functions, and orders. The Christian religion is hopeless without the Holy Ghost.

The Problems of the Church As in truth, so it is in service. The Church is helpless without the presence and power of the Spirit. The Church never talked so much about itself and its problems. That is always a bad sign. The lust for talk about work increases as the power for work declines. Conferences multiply when work fails. The problems of the Church are never solved by talking about them. The problems arise out of failures. There is no need to discuss the problem of reaching the masses, so long as the masses are being reached.

There is no problem of empty churches, so long as churches are full. There is no class-meeting question, so long as the classmeeting throbs with life and ministers to the manifold needs of heart and life. The power to attract is in attractiveness, and it is useless to advertise the banquet if there is nothing to eat. We are acting as though the only remedy for decline were method, organization, and compromise. The Church is failing to meet modern needs, grip the modern mind, and save modern life.

The saints are the ordained rulers of the earth, but they do not rule; indeed, they have dropped the scepter and repudiated the responsibility. The helplessness of the Church is pathetic and tragic. There might be no such Person as the Holy Ghost. Believers Without the Holy Ghost The Church knows quite well both

the reason and the remedy for failure. The human resources of the Church were never so great. The opportunities of the Church were never so glorious. The need for the work of the Church was never so urgent.

The crisis is momentous; and the Church staggers helplessly amid it all. When the ancient Church reproached God with sleeping at the post of duty, God charged His people with being staggering drunk. The Church knows perfectly well what is the matter. It is sheer cant to seek the explanation in changed conditions. When were conditions ever anything else? The Church has lost the note of authority, the secret of wisdom, and the gift of power, through persistent and willful neglect of the Holy Spirit of God.

Confusion and impotence are inevitable when the wisdom and resources of the world are substituted for the presence and power of the Spirit of God. Proofs abound. The New Testament furnishes examples of Churches filled with the Spirit and Churches without the Spirit. The differences are obvious. The Church of which Apollos was minister had not so much as heard that the Spirit was given. The Church in our day has no such excuse. Ours is the sin of denial. He has been shut out from the province in which He is indispensable.

Religion has been reconstructed without Him. There is no denial of the supernatural, but it is insisted that the supernatural must conform to natural law. It is admitted that truth is inspired, but its inspiration must develop along the lines of natural selection and growth. Religion cannot be allowed to have come upon any other lines than those of literature, philosophy, and ethics. The Christian religion has simply the honor of being less faulty than the rest. Jesus Christ must be accounted for in the same way.

He is simply the crown and consummation of a progressive humanity. The emphasis is upon the Man, and in that emphasis there is reason to rejoice but the strange thing is that in the intense interest in Jesus the certainties about Him that come through the Spirit have been lost.

Doctrine Without Experience

The Church still has a theology of the Holy Ghost, but it has no living consciousness of His presence and power. Theology without experience is like faith without works: it is dead. The signs of death abound. Prayer-meetings have died out because men did not believe in the Holy Ghost. The liberty of prophesying has gone because men believe in investigation and not in inspiration. There is a dearth of conversions because faith about the New Birth as a creative act of the Holy Ghost has lost its grip on intellect and heart. The experience of the Second Gift of Grace is no longer preached and testified, because Christian experience, though it may have to begin in the Spirit, must be perfected in the wisdom of the flesh and the culture of the schools. Confusion and impotence are the inevitable results when the wisdom and resources of the world are substituted for the presence and power of the Spirit.

The rebound from materialism is seen in such movements as Christian Science, Spiritualism, and Theosophy. It is the truth in these things that gives them their power, and it is useless to denounce them. They are the reaction of the spirit against the bondage of the flesh and of the mind. The cravings they represent must be met by the experience of Pentecost. Modernism and Mysticism are also the products of a religion that is not baptized of the Holy Ghost. Sacerdotalism is another. These things flourish on impoverished soil and dunghills. They are the works of the flesh, and the product of spiritual death. The remedy for them is not in reproach and bitterness, but in floods and rivers, winds and sun. The answer is in the demonstration of a supernatural religion, and the only way to a supernatural religion is in the abiding presence of the Spirit of God.

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