

Maclaren (A.), *Sermons*, ii. 77.
 Matheson (G.), *Spiritual Development of St. Paul*, 6.
 Miller (J. R.), *Help for the Common Days*, 40.
 Moore (A. L.), *The Message of the Gospel*, 57.
 Murray (A.), *Like Christ*, 149.
 Newman (J. H.), *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, iii. 254.
 Oosterzee (J. J. van), *Year of Salvation*, ii. 189.
 Raleigh (A.), *Quiet Resting-Places*, 123.
 Robertson (F. W.), *Lectures on Corinthians*, 294.
 Sanday (W.), *Oracles of God*, 83.
 Selby (T. G.), *Lesson of a Dilemma*, 243.
 Temple (F.), *Bampton Lectures*, 94.
 Thornton (L.), *Opposites*, 181.
 Tophel (G.), *Work of the Holy Spirit*, 79.
 Wells (J.), *Bible Images*, 269.
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The Work of the Holy Spirit in Christ, the Norm of His Work in Man.

BY THE REV. JOHN ROBSON, D.D., ABERDEEN.

"Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS."—MATT. i. 20, 21.

"Jesus also having been baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily form, as a dove, upon Him, and a voice came out of heaven, Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased."—LUKE iii. 21, 22.

If a chemist wishes to discover the action of a chemical substance in colouring water, he tries to obtain perfectly pure water; and, until he does so, he cannot be sure of the result. If the water he uses be impregnated with salts or any other impurity, he may form some approximation to the result, but he can never be quite sure. When once he has made the experiment with perfectly pure water, he can make allowance for the effect of foreign elements in all other cases.

So if we wish to understand the work of the Holy Spirit in man, we must first know what is the work which He works on man in his normal or perfectly pure state. The defect, it seems to me, of most treatises on the Holy Spirit is that they deal only with His work in man as polluted by sin. And, while this is the work that concerns us as sinners, yet, to make it the starting-point, is to start from a state of disorder which will prevent us reaching conclusions with anything like certainty. To understand the work of the Holy Spirit in man we must first note His normal working, His work in a sinless man, and then we shall be better able to understand His work in sinful men.

The only sinless man who has ever lived is Jesus Christ. Let us then seek to trace the work of the Spirit in Him. In doing so, we look merely at His human nature. While we must ever remember His Godhead, we must not forget that He was made in all things like unto His brethren, and in His relation to the Holy Spirit while on earth He was like them too.

Now, there are two points at which we may say the Holy Spirit came into contact with Jesus Christ: He was born of the Spirit; He was baptized with the Spirit.

He was born of the Spirit. This was declared in the words of the angel to Mary, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee" (Luke i. 35); and to Joseph, "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. i. 20).

In both these passages we have the declaration that Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit. The image of God, which had been implanted in the

first Adam, and by him had been lost, was created anew in the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

To bring out the full significance of this for us, let us look at what Jesus Himself has said concerning the new birth: "Except a man be born anew (or from above), he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John iii. 3). In this, too,—the necessity of being born from above,—He was like all men. Yet He could not apply it to Himself. He said to Nicodemus, "Marvel not that I said unto you, *Ye* must be born from above." He Himself had no need of this new birth, for it coincided with His natural birth. Of man generally it is true that "that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John iii. 6). In man the natural, the flesh, comes first; and the spiritual, the spirit, comes after; and so in man, when the spiritual birth does take place, there are two contrary elements, and the contest between them continues throughout life. But in Jesus Christ the natural and the spiritual birth were one and the same. In Him the perfect fusion took place at birth, which, in His people, will not take place till the resurrection. There were no contradictory elements in His nature to be reconciled, but perfect harmony from infancy.

And in the life thus begun there was a perfect harmonious growth. We are told that up to twelve years of age, "The child grew, and waxed strong, becoming full of wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke ii. 40). Then we have the incident of His being found in the temple at the age of twelve (Luke ii. 21-50), with the evidence that gives of His growth in wisdom, and His consciousness that God was His Father. Then follows all the account we have of the following eighteen years of His life. "And Jesus advanced in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and with men" (Luke ii. 52). In this we have the account of a steady growth—growth in the physical life, growth in the spiritual life. The one was the consequence of His natural birth, the other the consequence of His spiritual birth. And as the birth in the case of Jesus was one, the growth too was one.

With this perfect nature, perfect in the Spirit as well as in the flesh, it might seem as though He had all that He needed for doing the great Messianic work for which He was born. During these years we may believe that He received the education which Jewish children of His station usually

received; that He learned the trade and did the work of a carpenter in Joseph's workshop in Nazareth; that, as He grew up, He took an interest in all the questions affecting the welfare of His town and people; that He joined in the worship of the synagogue, and in the prayers of the household. We have evidence, too, that His life impressed those nearest to Him (John ii. 5). But we have also evidence that He gave no public intimations then of His fitness for the work of the last years of His life. When He visited Nazareth (Mark vi. 2, 3), after the opening of His ministry, His preaching was an entire revelation to His fellow-townsmen. There was no miracle, no discourse that they could recall, which might have led them to anticipate the prophetic work of His mature years. His birth from above had enabled Him to lead the life of a perfect man, but not to do any public work of teaching.

Why did He remain all these years without entering on His great work? Because—I say it with all reverence—He had not yet one essential requisite: the Baptism and power of the Holy Ghost. Before He entered on that work He needed and He received that Baptism.

This brings us to the second stage of the Spirit's work in Christ—His Baptism. All the evangelists (Matt. iii. 16, 17; Mark i. 10; Luke iii. 21, 22; John i. 31, 32) refer to it. All unite in bearing record as to the form in which it came.

Out of the opened heaven the Spirit was seen descending in bodily form like a dove, and abiding upon Him. What did this signify? Was it not just that thenceforth Jesus was endued with all the power of the Holy Ghost—power to know the truth fully—power to declare it perfectly—power to control nature and to destroy the works of the devil—power to reach and save the souls of men?

Why was the symbol of the dove chosen? The dove is one of the most patient, persistent, and gentle of all birds in brooding and bringing forth the living creature from the egg. It was under this form that the action of the Spirit in creation is spoken of—in evolving from chaos the various forms of existence and life. Under the same image He is spoken of as evolving spiritual life out of the moral chaos of man's fallen nature. In this power the Spirit came on Jesus and dwelt in Him, not to evolve a spiritual life, which already existed in Him in full perfection, but to go out from

Him and through Him to regenerate a fallen world.

It was this possession of the Spirit which constituted the difference between His public life and His life in Nazareth. He was baptized with the Holy Spirit for the ministry which He was called to accomplish. He was thenceforth the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed of the Spirit. All His subsequent career was guided by the Spirit and accomplished in the power of the Spirit; and this we find most completely recognised alike by Jesus and by the evangelists.

After His baptism, we read that "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from Jordan" (Luke iv. 1). This fulness of the Spirit remained with Him constantly throughout His ministry, and enabled Him to do all the work to which it called Him.

The prelude to it was going into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Here we are distinctly told that He was led thither by the Spirit (Matt. iv. 1; Mark i. 12; Luke iv. 1).

The next step was going to Galilee to begin His work of teaching and healing, and this He did in the power of the Spirit (Luke iv. 14).

Thereafter He went up to Nazareth, and when He there stood up to teach, He applied to Himself the words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor: he hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke iv. 18, 19). This description covers the whole of His Messianic work, and He attributes it all to the power which He has as being anointed with the Spirit of the Lord.

This truth He also assumes in confuting the Pharisees when they accused Him of casting out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. He replied to them, "If I by the Spirit of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come nigh unto you" (Matt. xii. 28). He was conscious that it was the power of the Holy Spirit which enabled Him to do those wonderful works which excited the astonishment and rage of His adversaries.

If we turn to the testimony of the apostles, we find the same view of the source of Christ's power. Peter, addressing the household of Cornelius, said, "God anointed Him (Jesus of Nazareth) with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about

doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil" (Acts x. 38). Here Peter speaks of the power which Jesus had to do good and to heal as being the consequence of His being anointed with the Holy Spirit.

But it may be said that all this was only preliminary to His death, the great sacrifice by which He made atonement for sin. Regarding it, we read in the Hebrews, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. ix. 14). Here the free act of Christ in offering Himself a sacrifice to God is fully recognised, but the eternal Spirit is also recognised as the power which enabled Him to perform this supreme act.

The resurrection was the sequel of the crucifixion, and this, too, was accomplished by the agency of the Spirit. This is a truth recognised rather than affirmed by the sacred writers. Paul says that Jesus Christ "was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead" (Rom. i. 4; see also viii. 11). The same truth is also recognised in the words of Peter with reference to Christ "being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the Spirit." These passages indicate the agency of the Spirit in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. While it was the Father who raised Him, yet He did so by giving Him the power to rise, and this power was the power of the Holy Spirit.

After His resurrection, one great work on earth remained for Him to do, and that was to give His apostles the commission to carry on His work. With regard to that, too, we read that before being received up "He had given commandment through the Holy Ghost unto the apostles whom He had chosen" (Acts i. 2). So that in this final act on earth—in the beginning of the resurrection-life—the Holy Spirit was still His guide and power.

It may be said that these passages are disconnected and taken away from the context. But it is only in such a way that we can get light on such a truth as this. For it is not one that is formally taught in Scripture; it is assumed as existing, and is therefore referred to only incidentally. And this gives it more weight, for it shows that Christ and His apostles alike assumed as a truth which did not need to be affirmed,

because never doubted, that the source of Christ's power was His being anointed with the Holy Spirit. And we see that in the whole of His public ministry, from His baptism unto the day that He was received up, He did all by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Summing up, then, the work of the Spirit in Jesus Christ, we see that in His life there were two periods: the first dating from His birth when, born of the Holy Spirit, He lived the life of the Spirit—the same life which His brethren of mankind were called to lead, but which He alone led perfectly; the second dating from His baptism, when, in addition to the life of the Spirit, He had the baptism, the anointing of the Spirit, and by it did the work of the kingdom of God, the ministry for which He came to earth.

This is the only instance we have of the work of the Holy Spirit in a perfect man, and by its light we must seek to understand the work of the Spirit in sinful men.

Does it cast any light on the original design of the Spirit in the creation of man? That design, we have seen, was ruined by the Fall, and from the ruins we can hardly judge what the ultimate end was to have been. What does the example of Jesus show with regard to it? He was the second Adam, and from Him we may learn something of what the life of the first Adam was meant to be. And we learn this: that, for the completion of the purpose of His life, divine power—the power of the Holy Spirit—was needful. The second Adam could not accomplish His life-work without it; as little could the first Adam have done so. In the glimpses we get of communion with God in Eden, we have traces of this power and guidance. Had Adam yielded to it as completely as Christ did, the aim of his life would have been accomplished. But when he disobeyed and followed other guidance, he ruptured that union by which alone his life could be guided to its true issue, and fell into that disorder and death which has overtaken all his descendants.

More important is the practical question as to the light which Christ's example casts on the work of the Spirit in sinful man.

As in Jesus Christ, so in man we may look for the Birth and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. We may expect that the birth should precede the baptism, that the baptism should always follow the

birth, and that it should never come except in the foundation of the spiritual birth and life.

But here comes in the disturbing element of man's sin and fall. Man, as born into the world, is void of that spiritual element which Christ had in full power. His spiritual nature is warped, tainted, ruined, and incapable in itself of the divine life. The spiritual birth for him must be being born anew—a divine power coming into him restoring the spiritual sense, quickening from the spiritual death. Thus the act by which the spiritual birth is produced in man is of itself somewhat of the nature of a baptism—a power coming on him from without, not a power that is part of his own nature. And all the elements of the man's nature, all the circumstances in which the Spirit accomplishes His regenerating work must be taken into account.

Thus it is quite possible that in the conversion of a sinner the birth and the baptism, the power of a new life and the power for work in the kingdom, may seem to come almost simultaneously. In Jesus Christ, the perfect man, thirty years elapsed between the birth and the baptism of the Spirit. In the case of Paul, the greatest of His apostles, there was, as far as we can judge, an interval of only three days.¹ But the cause of this difference is not far to seek. Jesus was born an infant with the human and the divine life perfect within Him. But just because it was a true human nature He had, He could not do His public work till that nature had attained its full maturity; and when He was thus matured, the call and the power for His public ministry were given. Paul, on the other hand, had fully matured in all his human powers, physical and mental, before the spiritual birth took place within him. The moment he received the new birth, he was otherwise fit for entering on public service. So the power for the new life, and the power to work for the Master, came very near together.

Again, it is possible that there may be the birth and the life resulting from it, and not the baptism. If we could imagine the life of Jesus to have ended before he left Nazareth, we would have an example of this. And there are some ardent evangelistic Christians living nowadays, who, if they had lived then and beheld Jesus in Nazareth, would have said that His was not a spiritual life, because He was doing no spiritual work. There are many Christians who are living the life of Jesus in Nazareth, not the life of Jesus in Galilee, and

¹ Cf. Acts ix. 9, 17.

we need not on that account doubt that they are true children of God. There may have been no call to service, and consequently no baptism for service; and in living the life of Christ, and thereby witnessing for Christ, they are doing all that God requires of them. Generally to each child of God there will be a call to some service, and with the call will come the baptism; but the service may be a humble one, unnoticed by others, and leaving the impression that there has been neither the baptism nor the work.

Finally, there may be the baptism of the Spirit without the life of the Spirit. While I do not believe that the call to service would come without the call to life, nor the power for service be given without the power for life, yet it is a very solemn and awful fact that the latter may be resisted and the former cherished; with the result that there may be endowment of the Spirit without life in the Spirit, service in the kingdom without being born into the kingdom. Hence we have

such a character as Balaam endued with the highest prophetic gifts of the Spirit, and yet living a life at enmity with God and His people. Hence we have to the present day instances of men of high evangelistic power, a means of blessing to others, and yet themselves living in sin. Our Lord tells us that there will be many such, many who will say, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by Thy name, and by Thy name cast out devils, and by Thy name do many wondrous works?" Yes, they had the power for service, and perhaps also the call to service, but not the life. And so Jesus says to them, "I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." It is the new birth that is the condition of entering the kingdom of God; without that no service, however distinguished, will avail. And it is one of the mysteries of free will in conflict with divine grace that it may resist the call to salvation and the power of salvation, and yet listen to the call to service and experience some of the power for service.

Religious Reserve on the Subject of Heaven.

BY THE REV. PREBENDARY WHITEFOORD, M.A., PRINCIPAL OF SALISBURY THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE.

BEDE, in his *Church History*, tells how he had heard from some traveller in the Holy Land of a church dedicated to the ascension of the Saviour. Year by year, as the festival came round, and the congregation was gathered for worship, a rushing wind was wont to pass through the building so exceeding strong that the people were fain to fall low on their knees until its force was spent. The narrative is exceedingly characteristic of the historian, and its suggestive teaching is of more significance and value than any inquiry is likely to prove as to the evidence for the facts of the story. It is enough that it indicates that there can be no serious and devout contemplation of any truth of faith without some correspondent manifestation to men of the Divine Presence.

In such a spirit must every inquirer search the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven if he would look for any reward for his task. For after he has spent upon any such investigation the fullest powers of a God-given intellect, there still remains the devotional attitude, the self-surrender of the heart without which he will never feel the breath of God

about him, lifting him heavenward, because it casts him on his knees.

Happily this spirit is not rare, and yet it is impossible not to be conscious, either through personal experience or through observation of men, how close that habit of reserve is which wraps up each individual in regard to all private aims and hopes, and that this disposition reaches a kind of climax in the religious sphere. Men may think with much seriousness upon the things which concern their common salvation, and their thoughts may pass into the natural expressions of devotion. But here the nearest and dearest of friends is a stranger. To share any such experience is an intrusion, and is resented as such. Let us admit at once that much of the sentiment which prevents Christian people from free interchange of thought, and from any expansive communication on the high and holy themes of their faith, is not a blameworthy sentiment. The freedom of speech (*παρρησία*) which in New Testament literature is observed at once as a commendable habit and as a right object for prayer, has for its main refer-