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SERMONIC.

CHRIST'S UNION WITH THE SINNER.

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*Ruth the Moabitess have I purchased to be
my wife.*—Ruth iv: 10.

If we could believe that the Bible was inspired to furnish man with an exalted literature—if we could recognize as its object the cultivation of the æsthetic faculty—if we could regard the development of beauty as its normal and primal function, we could easily account for the presence of the Book of Ruth within its bounds. Never was there so sweet a story in so narrow compass. A few skillful and easy strokes of the artist's brush, and we have before us a picture of unequalled pathos, varied in its incidents, and yet one in its meaning and influence. The famine-driven family; the exile's residence; the marriages soon clouded by death; the return home; the sad contrast with former prosperity; the daughter-in-law's faithful affection; the scenes in the harvest field; the rich lord's compassion, and the final exaltation of the ruined family, form a rare sketch of life's vicissitudes and virtue's reward.

The graceful grouping, the subdued colors, the fair figure of Ruth herself, and the quiet back-ground of rural life, elicit from every emotional nature not only admiration, but affection. Theocritus and Virgil could not have done this. Neither Homer nor Herodotus could have told so tender a story. No work of art, ancient or modern, could, by so brief an application, create in the reader's heart such an April day of sunshine and shower as does this inimitable sketch of the young Moabitess.

But we know that the Bible was given us for higher than æsthetic purposes. It is true that it embraces the highest forms of poetry and prose, and that all styles of beauty are found within its leaves; but this is only the *clothing*, the *garniture*, of the truth. The truth itself lies within, and it is of this sacred occupant that the Bible is the *ark*. The vast moral truths of God's government, and especially of His merciful interposition for man's salvation, form the kernel of divine revelation; and he who only discovers the *beauty* of the Scriptures sees no farther than the shell. There are many of refined taste who cannot fail to admire the fair

[The first several sermons are reported in full; the remainder are given in condensed form. Every care is taken to make these reports correct; yet our readers must not forget that it would be unfair to hold a speaker responsible for what may appear in a condensation, made by another, of his discourse.—Ed.]

THE CHURCH: ITS STRENGTH AND ITS WEAKNESS.

BY WILLIAM M. PAXTON, D.D., MODERATOR OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH. PREACHED AT ITS OPENING SESSION, MAY 19th, 1881, IN BUFFALO, N. Y.

Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion!
—Isa. lii: 1.

THIS language is a direct address from God to His ancient Church. The image which it presents to our minds is that of a *sleeping giant*. The Church of God had been a giant power in the world; but now, at the time in which God speaks, it had relapsed into slumber: the giant had put off his strength, and, being beset with enemies, this position of torpor and inaction was one of peril. Hence this arousing note of alarm, "Awake, awake!" The slumbering giant is not only summoned to arouse to consciousness, but to *put on* and *put forth* his strength for conflict and for victory. Here, then, we take up our first thought:—

I. The text is first a forcible reminder of the mysterious and discouraging fact that the Church of God, in all ages, **MAY HAVE ITS TIMES OF WEAKNESS, AS WELL AS ITS TIMES OF POWER**—times when its strength seems to be put off, as well as times when its power is put forth.

When the Church first went forth from Jerusalem, a little flock, scattered hither and thither by the storm of persecution, *it was a time of power*. It was then but an infant of days, but it sprang into a giant of strength. It spoke, and demons fled; it smote, and pagan altars fell; idol temples were shaken, and hoary superstitions, entrenched behind the power of mighty empires, were riven to pieces. It advanced, and the scepter of empire was laid at its feet. A new civilization sprang up in its pathway, and the fashion of the world's countenance was altered. It was a day of power when the Church of Christ, as Paul Richter has said, "lifted empires off their hinges, and turned the stream of centuries out of its channel."

But a thousand years roll on, and a time of weakness follows this era of power; the morning came, but the night also—the dark night of the middle ages. The giant sleeps; his strength is put off; he reposes amidst the scarlet trappings and gilded blazonry of the Papacy, and seems to have wilted into a senile imbecility. Or, if he awakes, he is bound, like Samson, hand and foot with withes and cords of superstition, and made to do service in the treadmill of the Philistines. He is "shorn of his locks, and wist not that the Lord had departed from him."

But again there came a time of power when, on the morning of the Reformation, the Church heard the cry, "Awake, awake!" and, springing up with renewed youth, it put on its strength; and, carrying off the gates of Gaza, it sent consternation to the hearts of its enemies, and, wrenching away the pillars of the false temple, it buried its foes in the ruins of the broken superstitions which their own hands had reared.

There was a time of weakness when the chill of formalism followed in the track of the Reformation, and the Church sank into the coma of a widespread paralysis; again, when a disguised Romanism riveted her fetters; and still again when the Socinian apostasy spread its blight over Great Britain.

But then came times of power when the Church arose in quickened majesty to smite the tyrant with the broken fetters which had eaten into its own soul; and still again, times of wondrous spiritual revival, when the call sounded by Wesley and Whitefield, like the voice of the prophet in the valley of vision, seemed to awake the dead.

We have pursued this detail thus far that, from the standpoint of the past, we may put the question with a view to its present bearings.

Why these periods of weakness?

If the Church is a giant begirt with power, and that power is divine; if it is commissioned to exorcise the evil spirit from the world, and goes forth

with the promise of help and victory, then why these times of weakness?

These eras of feebleness give occasion to the enemy to boast, whilst even the faithful become faint of heart, and ask, with anxiety, Is it not strange?

But may not our fears be misplaced, and the boasts of the enemy premature?

That was a scene of pitiable weakness at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration, when a crowd of enemies hooted and jeered at the disciples of Jesus because they could not cast the evil spirit out of the demoniac boy—they had tried and failed, and the enemy held them in contempt.

At the very time that Jesus was transfigured in power and glory upon the mount, they were failing through weakness, and crouching under scorn. But the fears of these disciples were misplaced, and the jeers of these enemies were premature; for, when these disciples, soon after, were sent out upon a mission, they returned rejoicing, and saying: "Lord, even the devils were subject unto us."

Thus it is that the very same disciples who fail to-day may succeed to-morrow—power follows after weakness, and victory succeeds defeat.

Still the question returns, *Why these times of weakness?* Are we to leave it simply as a mystery involved in the Divine Sovereignty, or is there a reason for every check or hindrance in the way of progress—and that reason involving responsibility and guilt to the Church itself?

A single illustration may, perhaps, furnish the answer. When the Israelites settled in the land of promise, the actual possession of the respective portions assigned by lot depended upon the power of each tribe to drive out the native Canaanites from their part of the inheritance. It is recorded of the tribe of Judah (Judges i: 19): "The Lord was with Judah: and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron." Here are instances both of power and weakness, of success and

failure; and yet God was with Judah on both occasions. Why, then, the failure? The reason is clearly stated: "They could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron." They *could not*—is not this strange? Could not God have swept those chariots with the besom of destruction? Certainly, but He would not, because God has a plan, and He will not depart from it. The case is plain. The battle was the Lord's. The power to succeed was divine, but it was also human. Judah must fight. According to the divine plan, man's part is as indispensable as God's part—but in this case the human part failed.

God was with them in the mountains, and, when Judah fought, He conquered. God was with them, also, in the valley; but the iron chariots of the enemy filled the tribe of Judah with such terror that they could not and would not fight, and hence they failed to drive out the inhabitants of the valley. The simple explanation is, that man's part in this struggle failed—God's part is always certain.

Here, then, is an obvious principle which we have only to apply to the work and warfare of the Church. God is with His Church as He was with Judah. The Church has a divine commission to conquer the world for Christ, just as the Israelites had a commission from God to possess the land of Canaan. The power of the Church is divine, but it is also human. What man can do, he must do. To roll away the stone from the grave of Lazarus was something that man could do; hence our Lord commanded human hands to do it. This act of human strength must antecede the word of power which raised the dead.

The principle is, therefore, plain: Divine power and human strength must work together, each in its appropriate sphere. Divine efficiency does not supersede human agency, but only supplements its weakness. If our part—man's part in the work or warfare of the Church, is properly executed, God's part will never fail. But, as the terror of the

iron chariots of the enemy paralyzed the strength of Judah, so that, the human part being wanting, the victory was lost; so, in the Church, if any cause supervenes to weaken, or render ineffective, the strength which God expects us to put forth, He will not depart from His plan, or interpose to save us from the results of our own weakness, or to hide us from the scorn and derision of the world.

Under the light of these principles, let us endeavor to interpret the present time. *Is this a period of the Church's weakness?* Is the giant slumbering? Has he put off his strength, and is this a call from God to awake? It would be folly to hide from our eyes the fact that there is such an impression upon the minds of many. There are weak hands that hang down, and faint hearts that are filled with painful apprehensions. There are enemies, too, that rejoice and fill the air with boasting. But may not both these fears and boastings be ill-founded and premature?

The past ten years has been a crucial period in history. The whole world has been brought into close contact, like one family. Human thought, like a seething caldron, has been boiling over intense fires. New discoveries, new principles, new forces, new methods of thought, have been coming to the surface. A law of change and revolution is working everywhere and in everything. The Church of God has been tried, but so has everything else.

Nations, governments, systems, institutions of every kind, have been tried; society itself, and even the family, which lies at the foundation of everything else, has been painfully tried in this universal strain.

In no period of past history have circumstances so conspired to test to the utmost the inherent strength and persistent vitality of the Christian Church. Infidelity has assumed new forms; attacks have been made from unexpected quarters. Ideas, which are the most potent forces, and which, in the struggle of the world's history, have always been mightier than armies, have risen

in new and menacing forms from the hot-bed of the world's thought, and have struggled to positions of power.

Physical science has achieved signal success, and, as is natural, its methods of reasoning and modes of proof have inspired confidence and attained such popularity, that science has become arrogant, and claims that its proofs are the only proofs, and that whatever cannot be demonstrated by its methods must be ruled out of the category of the knowable. In the hurry of rapid progress, theories and hypotheses have been mistaken for science, and, in the hands of enemies, these unproved assumptions have swelled into great boasting Goliaths, who stand and defy the armies of the living God.

With these evil influences the circumstances of the times have conspired to deepen the trial of the Church. The pulpit, which was once the master in the empire of thought, has found a rival in the press, which weakens its power, by occupying and controlling the same sphere—and too often in a spirit of decided hostility.

The wars, commotions, political excitements and commercial distresses of the last decade have absorbed attention, turned thought from serious channels, opened the floodgates of vice, and sent demoralizing influences, sweeping by a thousand channels, through the whole land.

Whilst all these hostile influences have combined to weaken the strength and stay the progress of the Church, what is the result?

More people listen to the Gospel now than at any one time since the apostles of Jesus Christ first went out from Jerusalem. At no time in the world's history have governments and powers all over the world been compelled to give such attention to Christian thought and sentiment as now. Never at any time in human history have so many children been under the influence of Christian instruction.

During the past ten years the population of this country has increased twenty-five per cent.; during the same

period the membership of the Church, in some denominations, has increased twenty-seven per cent., in some twenty-nine and one-half per cent., in some forty-six and forty-seven per cent., in some sixty-one per cent.—the average increase in the six leading denominations is forty-eight per cent. Thus it appears that the Church has not only kept abreast of the progress of the age, but, in a decade when the population has been swollen by vast streams of emigration from every part of the world, the advance of the Church has far outstripped an increase of population that is a marvel in the history of any people. In the battle with infidelity, which has been waged, upon the part of the enemy, with a vigor and persistence never before equalled, there has been no reverse, no surrender. It is a simple fact that there has been victory along the whole line. The intensest struggle has been around the theory of Evolution. But that citadel of the enemy has been shaken. Prof. Tyndall himself has acknowledged that the theory of development is lamentably deficient in proofs—that it is simply an hypothesis, unproved, and has, therefore, no place in the domain of science.* No, no, the defeat has been on the side of the enemy—the Church stands unscathed—no rampart has been scaled, no bastion taken, no citadel surrendered.

If, then, we press the question—Is this a time of the Church's weakness, or of the Church's power? we answer, It is both. This, we think, is the true answer. As against the enemy, it is a time of power. The Church has met the enemy, and prevailed without putting forth half her strength. As against the influences which we have described as combining to try the Church in the

last decade, it is a time of power. It has met this combination of adversities and advanced. Like a ship breasting the storm, it has ridden the wave and bounded onward. Never, at any time, has the equipment of the Church been so complete as now. It has a command of money, of men, of effective appliances and organizations for work, which prepare it for aggressive effort, and the putting forth of mighty energies in time to come.

But if the question is asked—*Is the Church putting forth her strength?* Is she bringing into active play all the powers with which God has invested her? Is she alive to the higher spiritualities of her divine call? Is she smiting the powers of evil with the mighty arm which God has given her?—we answer, No: *it is a time of weakness. The giant slumbers.* The human part, both of the work and the warfare, is but feebly executed.

Distinct and well-known causes supervene to weaken and render ineffective our part of the work, and the call comes, growing louder and louder, gathering a stronger and deeper emphasis from every passing providence: "Awake! awake! put on thy strength, O Zion!"

Let us, then, stop here a moment and think, whilst we inquire in the second place:—

II. WHAT IS THE STRENGTH OF THE CHURCH, and when is it put off? or, in other words, what causes may supervene to weaken or render it ineffective?

What are the elements of power with which God has invested the Church?

If the Church of God is a giant; if, in the past, it has smitten so many false systems to the dust—then, what is the power which it wields; what is the weapon with which it smites?

1. *We answer that the first element of power is the Gospel, the Word, the truth of God.* This is the one implement for our work, the one weapon for our warfare. As if to guard against all mistakes and show us precisely where our power lies, the Spirit of truth points us to the Gospel, and tells us that it is the power of God. It is the

* Prof. Tyndall's words, as given in his article in the *Fortnightly Review*, are as follows: "There ought to be a clear distinction made between science in the state of hypothesis and science in the state of fact. And inasmuch as it is still in its hypothetical stage, the ban of exclusion ought to fall upon the theory of evolution. I agree with Virchow that the proofs of it are still wanting, that the failures have been lamentable, that the doctrine is utterly discredited."

ordained instrument which He makes mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. The common way in every undertaking is to look first upon our work, and then upon the instrument which we have for its accomplishment.

The astronomer looks at the heavens. These stars are to be counted; these constellations are to be mapped; the orbits of these planets are to be observed. Here is a vast and complicated work; but how is it to be done? By the telescope. He has this, and nothing else. All the great results of astronomy must spring, first of all, from this single instrument.

Just so the Church looks out upon its work. It is commissioned to bring this whole world in captivity to the obedience of Christ. Here is a mighty and multiform work; but how is it to be achieved? By the Gospel. God has given us this, and nothing else, to save the world. It is the "power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." "It pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believed."

Not only is this true in the general, but every phase of the Church's work is connected with the truth, and every result is to be effected by this same instrumentality.

The Church is commissioned to save sinners; but how? "Go preach the Gospel to every creature": "He that believeth shall be saved." The Church is set for the *conversion of souls*; but it is the word of truth that turns them from darkness unto light—from the power of sin unto God. As the great end is to be attained by truth, by doctrine, so each step in the process is tied to the Word of God.

Are souls dead in sin? It is the call of the divine Word that is to awake the dead. Is man a wanderer who is to be brought back to God? It is the power of Gospel truth that lays upon him the arrest of grace, and makes him willing to "apprehend that for which he is apprehended of Christ Jesus."

In like manner *everything included in the experience of religion* in the heart springs from the doctrine of the Gospel. Are

the broken spirit and the contrite heart God's acceptable sacrifice? Are the hearts of men hard and stony, and is it our work to break these stony hearts into contrition? But how? Moses was commanded to smite the rock at Horeb, and bring from its bosom streams of water. How? He was given but one instrument—the slender rod that he held in his hand. To human view, the rock would be more likely to break the rod than the rod to rend the rock; but that fragile rod was God's ordained instrument of power; and, when it smote, the riven rock gushed with the living waters. Just so, the Word of God is the rod of power. We are commanded to smite with it alone, for, by nothing else can the stony heart be broken.

Is the Church set for the *regeneration of the world*? Must the soul of man be born again? How? The apostle answers: "We are born again by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever."

Is the Church established in the world as a *home, a nursery, a school to call and train a people for God in cleanness, purity, and morality*? Christ Himself indicates the means: "Sanctify them by Thy truth. Thy word is truth." Morality without truth is as impossible as a flower without seed; but the doctrine of the Gospel teaches us to approve the things that are excellent; and, as its proper result, it causes those who receive the truth into their hearts to abound in the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God.

But we need not continue the detail. From this showing, nothing can be plainer than that the power of the Church, instrumentally, lies in the Gospel. The Church's efficiency springs from doctrine. For every work which the Church is sent to do, this is the instrument of power.

This being so, we can readily see from this standpoint how this strength may be put off, and power give place to weakness. To neglect, to withhold, to minimize, to obscure in any manner the truth of God, is to put off this element of power,

and to bring in a time of weakness. As well might the soldier go into battle without his weapon, as the Church to go into the conflict without the Word of God. As well might the pioneer expect to clear the forest without an axe, as the Church to clear the field of the world for the harvest without "the truth as it is in Jesus."

The simple work of the Church is to manifest the truth. If, therefore, in any way, the human dispensation is rendered ineffective, or the truth in its manifestation is obscured or perverted, to that extent the strength of the Church is weakened, and its power of aggression abated.

This may occur when the truth is *depreciated, or its necessity not clearly recognized*. Thus, for example, some say: "Preach morality; let us hear more about the duties of life, and less about the doctrines of the cross." Others express the same idea when they say: "Religion is charity; let us hear more about charity, and less about dogma—an ounce of charity is worth a ton of doctrine." This may be the idle talk of ignorance, but it is more likely that "an enemy hath done this." He seeks to sow tares while men sleep. Preach morality! Morality, without principle, is a sham; it is tinselled fruit tied upon a Christmas-tree—the only connection is the tape that ties it. Morality is the fruit of principle; but principle is doctrine—and the only doctrine that bears this fruit is the doctrine of the cross. "Talk they of morals! O Thou bleeding Love! Our best morality is love of Thee!"

Charity is also contrasted with dogma. Dogma is doctrine. They who hate the cross call it dogma. As well might they say Let us have springs of water, but no clouds; but, if the clouds be wanting, there can be no fountains. So, if we put away doctrine, there can be no charity. The cloud of mercy that gathers around the cross is the source, the living spring, that flows from Calvary. We love our fellow-men, because we love Christ. Any other charity is as tinkling cymbals. If such ideas prevail, there is nothing left for the Church

but to drivel in weakness, and crouch beneath the world's scorn.

Again, if the truth of God is the instrument of power, and the human part of the work is simply its manifestation, then the strength of the Church must be weakened whenever the Gospel is subordinated to human themes.

If the Church dispenses essays upon history, antiquities, philosophy, politics, science—upon Darwin and Huxley; or if, instead of manifesting the Word of God, it reflects the light of the secular press; if it dispenses to the children, instead of bread, stones, gathered from the world's thoroughfares, or poison collected from the fields of rationalistic speculation, then, surely, it will be no marvel if the Church, instead of exorcising demons, sinks into imbecility, whilst evil spirits sport at her side, and haunt her very altars. In the same manner our strength is crippled when the Gospel is *caricatured by sensational themes, discussions, illustrations and expedients*, which attract attention, indeed, but which belittle the sacred doctrine of the cross, by associating it, in the minds of the thoughtless and worldly, with oddity, extravagance, coarseness and catch-penny expedients, to attract a crowd and fill the exchequer of a church.

What shall be the doom of those who take the sacred Gospel—the rod of God's power—and turn it into the wand of the juggler or the harlequin?

But, whilst causes like these paralyze our power, *there are others which produce simply an abatement of strength*. For example, the Church can only put forth half its strength when the Gospel is but half told. The symbol of the Church is the moon; but the moon can only show half her light when it is half eclipsed. If the Church, instead of listening to the command, "Preach the preaching that I bid thee"; if, instead of manifesting the whole truth, it simply exhibits phases of the Gospel, sections of the truth, aspects of the divine Word; if it sets out in full light the divine love, whilst it keeps back divine justice, under the shadow of a

dark eclipse; if it tells of Christ's teachings, and is silent about Christ's sacrifice; if it points to Christ's life, and not to Christ's blood, as the center of saving efficiency; if it sets out the freedom of man, and holds in abeyance divine sovereignty and efficacious grace; or if it minimizes the Gospel in the one sentence, "Come to Jesus"; or if it lays Christ as an humble suppliant at the feet of men until proud sinners imagine that it is a stoop of condescension to permit Jesus to save them—then, surely, it is no marvel that men turn away from a belittled Gospel and a belittled Savior, and that the Church sits in weakness when it has weakened its own strength, by paralyzing one of its own arms, and depending simply upon the hidings of its power.

2. Let us now pass to the second element of the Church's power—the *ministry*. Let us not lose sight of the figure of the text. The Church is a giant; the Gospel is the instrument of his work—the weapon of his warfare. But what wields the weapon? The giant's arm—this is the ministry. It is the arm or agent of the Church's power. The symbol of the Gospel is a hammer, a sword; but a hammer is powerless without a strong hand to use it; a sword is ineffective without a skillful arm to wield it. This arm, this sword, this agent of strength and skill, is the ministry. It takes the Gospel as an implement and uses it for all the purposes of the Church's mission, and in all the multifarious departments of its work. It seizes the Gospel as a weapon, and goes forth to fight the battles of God's Church and to achieve its victories.

This figure seems to describe accurately the particular kind of power with which the ministry is invested. It is not an original power inherent in itself, but a delegated power. It is the power of an agent, and it has an instrument of power put into its hands. It is not a power to infuse grace, or to forgive sins, or to bind the conscience, but simply an *administrative power*. It is a power of *vocation* to utter the Gos-

pel-call, to summon God's sons from afar, and His daughters from the ends of the earth. A *teaching power*—go teach all nations; preach the Gospel to every creature. A *dispensing power* to break the bread of life, and to distribute, with a liberal hand, to all God's children, giving to each a portion in due season. An *illuminating power*, to hold forth the word of life, and, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, to shine as lights in the world. A *power to reprove*, rebuke and exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. A *power to sow the seed* of the Word broadcast over the field of the world, and to reap when the fields are white for the harvest; a *plenipotentiary power*, to speak in the name of God; to open His charter of redemption; to propound His treaty of peace; to speak His promises; to entreat men, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled, as though God were speaking by them as ambassadors; a *sublime power*, to stand in God's name and cry, "O earth, earth, earth! hear the word of the Lord!"

This is the power that, beginning at Jerusalem, went forth upon its mission of conquest—that made the heathen cry: "These men that have turned the world upside down are come hither also!" The power that "sounded out from Jerusalem, through Macedonia and Achaia," and "round about unto Illyricum"; the power that smote the temple of the great goddess Diana until her oracle grew dumb; the power that proclaimed Jesus and the resurrection in the Areopagus at Athens, and planted the banner of the cross upon the throne of the Cæsars; the power that, as upon the wings of a mighty angel, has now carried the everlasting Gospel to the ends of the earth; the power that has already put the name of Jesus above every name, and that will, finally, make the proclamation: "It is done: the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ!" Now, if the ministry is such an element of power in the Church, then, turning our thought, as before, on the second question, we may readily

see when this strength is put on, and *when it is put off*. Whatever cripples or weakens or interferes with the right use and proper functions of a giant's arm, weakens and abates the effectiveness of the giant himself; so, whatever weakens the ministry, or hinders its effectiveness, puts off, to that extent, the strength of the Church, and introduces a time of weakness and defeat. *For example: the ministry, as an arm of power, may be withered by a perfunctory education.* Ministers may be taught to know about God, but not to know God. They may learn to explain and defend the Gospel, without having ever felt that a single Gospel truth has been riveted as a living, burning power in their own souls. To comprehend theology with the intellect is one thing; to receive it into the heart is another. A truth of God, born in us as a living experience, stirs, fires the soul, and remains with us an abiding power of the life. Such a truth is ours; it belongs to us; we can use it, and send it, like a flaming arrow, into the hearts of others. A man, who knows what it is to be a lost sinner, can drive this conviction of his own experience into the souls of others. A minister, who knows what it is to be a saved sinner, can tell of it with such power as to make others feel that there is nothing between them and eternal death but the blood of Jesus. But, without this experience, the minister will be a perfunctory drone stepping in a treadmill, or doling out his lifeless essay, whilst sinners are slipping through his fingers into perdition.

In the same manner, the ministry may be ineffective from misdirected effort. A giant's arm may be strong, but, if he strikes out wildly, or has not intelligence and skill enough to know precisely where to plant his blows, his efforts will be ineffective. So the ministry, if its efforts have no definite purpose, or if it aims at the wrong place—as, for example, at the intellect, instead of the conscience—will produce but feeble and partial results. Truth aimed at the intellect is a ray of light

shot into a dark place; but truth aimed at the conscience is a ball of fire—it carries heat as well as light, and it falls into a magazine of powder. It is God's plan that we aim at the conscience. The divine direction is: "By manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." God made the conscience for truth, just as He made the eye for light. Physiologists tell us that the mechanical construction of the eye is such that it supposes the existence of light; so the nature and functions of the conscience are such as suppose the existence of the truth of God. Hence light comes into the eye with a self-evidencing power. You do not need any one to prove to you that the sun shines—the light that comes into your eye is its own witness. Hence, if any one should suggest doubts about the existence of light, or offer philosophical objection as to its reality, you would not need scientific answers to such argument—the light itself, flashing into your eye, dissipates all doubt, answers all objections. So the truth of God comes to the conscience with a self-evidencing power. You do not need extraneous arguments to prove that it is God's truth—it is its own witness. A single flash of truth upon the conscience will scatter all doubt, and sweep all objections, like wreaths of mist before the wind. As long as man has conscience he must be true. Conscience will hear the witness of God's truth; hence the best answer to all skeptical doubts is the truth itself. As light sweeps all darkness from the eye, so truth sweeps all doubt from the conscience. As the eye abhors darkness, so the conscience abhors unbelief. Hence a ministry that pins truth upon the conscience is a power; a ministry that aims at the wrong mark is imbecile.

Again, the ministry must be a source of weakness instead of power to the Church, if it is not in sympathy with the hearts of the people, and the souls of perishing men.

The ministry "beseeches men in Christ's stead." It must, therefore, look upon men as Christ looked upon

them. What Christ saw in men was the soul, and that soul, in His estimate, is lost. His own supreme thought, the key-note of His life and passion, was the soul—the immortal soul. To save this was the joy that He set before Him, for which He endured the cross. He sends His ministers on the same errand, to think as He thought, to feel as He felt, about the souls of men. Their errand is to seek and save, to preach the Gospel to the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted. He might have sent angels to do this, but no—His plan is to save men by men, because there is a link of sympathy that binds man to man. He who was once lost but is found again, will know how to feel for the lost, and the lost will listen to him who was once lost himself. This is the natural power of the minister, the link of sympathy that binds him to the hearts of the people and the souls of men. If this be lost, the ministry is powerless. There is a complaint in England that the Church has lost its hold on the working classes: and who does not see in our own country that vast multitudes stand aloof from the Church? Where this is so, the preacher has lost his cunning. If the minister, for any reason, is lifted above the people; if his position, socially or otherwise, is such that he feels it a condescension to minister to the poor, or if the people feel that he is not one of them; if students of theology are taught to aim at a profession for support, or to look for places of ease and comfort; in a word, if the minister is not immersed, heart and soul, in his work, so that the people feel that his heart, his life, his sympathy, is with them, the magic charm which is the secret of his attraction is broken, and that which should be the arm of the Church's power, to bind up the broken-hearted, and to carry the lambs in its bosom, hangs in an imbecile paralysis, whilst lost sheep wander to destruction, and the Church sits in mortification and weakness.

3. The third and principal element of the Church's power is *The Holy Ghost*. Let us still keep to the suggestion of

the text. The implement of the Church's work is the Word; the arm of the Church's power is the ministry; but the power itself is the Holy Ghost.

In this view, the call of the text is full of meaning. It is the Spirit's call: "Awake! awake! put on thy strength!"—the strength which He proffers. Thy strength is My strength—*put it on; put it forth*. The strength of the Church is a trinity—the Word, the Ministry, the Spirit—but it is a trinity in unity; for the power, the *one* power, is the Holy Ghost. The Word, in its adaptation to the wants of man, has a power of congruity; the ministry, by the bond that connects man with man, has the power of sympathy, but neither, alone, is adequate to the supernatural aim of the Church's mission. The Word, alone, cannot raise the dead; the ministry, alone, cannot convert or save; but the Holy Ghost can make both mighty—the Word a thunderbolt, and the ministry a flame of fire. The Word is the Spirit's word. It has a divine authority behind it, a divine life in it, a divine power accompanying it. The ministry is the ministration of the Spirit, for, of every function, He is the author and the life. He calls the minister, qualifies him with gifts and graces, fills him with the fullness of the Gospel of peace, and makes his word an arrow that penetrates—a sword quick and powerful, a hammer that breaks in pieces, and a weapon that smites and prostrates the stronghold of Satan.

God has taken special pains that we shall make no mistake here. "Son of man, can these dry bones live?" was God's challenge to His prophet. Can the minister make them live, as invested with God's authority to preach, and furnished with God's Word? Let him try the experiment—Son of man, speak! utter the Word of God! say to these dry bones, Live! But no; there is no breath in them; the minister cannot make them live. Try again! speak! but now let it be the voice of prayer for the Spirit's power. "Come from the four winds, O breath! and breathe upon the slain." And now, when the minis-

ter feels that he is nothing, in answer to prayer the breath comes from the four winds, and the dead arise from the valley of dry bones, an exceeding great army. Oh, no! God means that there shall be no mistake here. The strength of the Church is the Spirit's power. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

Since, then, the Spirit's power is the strength of the Church, the want of the Spirit is the weakness of the Church. But the Holy Ghost is given—God hath given us His Son, and He hath also given us of His Spirit. If, then, the Church sits in weakness, it is because we do not put on this divine Spirit, and put forth this proffered strength. If the Church is not an effective, aggressive power in the world, it is because it puts off or puts away the strength of the Spirit. This is done when we *subordinate the divine Spirit to human agency*—when we substitute man's work for the Spirit's work; when, by organization or by human eloquence, or by methods and appliances, or by running the Church on business principles, we seek to effect that which it is the special office of the Spirit to accomplish. "God is a jealous God, and He will not give His glory to another." "Cursed be the man that maketh flesh his arm." If we put away the strength of the Holy Ghost in favor of the devices of human wisdom, we must expect that God will leave us to our own weakness until we find that the pride of our own strength brings a snare, and that the sparks of our own kindling go out in darkness.

Again, it is greatly to be feared that we put away the strength of the Spirit when the Church—the whole Church, the ministry and the people, fail to realize our profound and absolute dependence upon the power of the Spirit for success in all work. The Spirit of God is not straitened, nor is the Spirit given by measure. It is God's plan to convert and gather the nations by pouring out His Spirit upon all flesh. He started His Church out

from Jerusalem by the great revival of Pentecost.

He restored His Church from the night of the dark ages by the revival of the Reformation. As He causes the earth to bring forth and bud by showers from heaven, so He causes His Church to abound in the fruits of righteousness by times of refreshing from on high. All history shows that God works by a revived Church. If, therefore, we are content to put away God's strength and sit in weakness, we may expect that God will set us aside, and raise up better men to do His work. "When the enemy comes in like a flood," a revival is the standard which the Spirit of the Lord lifts up against him.

A revival is a day of the Spirit's power, when the enemy is repulsed; when sinners are made willing; when doubt and unbelief are dissipated.

If such a day of power were granted to us now, you would see rationalism, skepticism and infidelity driven like smoke before the wind.

It is in the day of the Spirit's power that Christ girds His sword upon His thigh, and rides forth prosperously.

III. Such being the elements of the Church's power, and the causes which convert this strength into weakness, let us now, in conclusion, listen to God's call to the Church to put on and to put forth **HER STRENGTH**.

"Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion!" An army puts on its strength when it goes forth to battle, but this is strength to destroy. A fireman puts on his strength when he enters a burning dwelling, and plucks its sleeping inmates from the flames. This is strength to save. O it is a glorious thing to put on strength to save! *How, then, shall we put on this strength?* The sun puts on his strength when "he comes forth from his chamber, and rejoices as a strong man to run a race." But this is not the strength of the Church. Physical strength is put on in one way, and spiritual strength in another. Some seem to imagine that they have only to arouse and stir them-

selves into an agony of effort. But you remember that Samson arose and shook himself, and thought he would go forth and smite the Philistines, as aforetime; but, alas! the strength was not there—it had departed from him. So the Church may shake herself and advance to the conflict, but the strength is not there; the Philistines are upon her, and she wists not that the Lord had departed. No, no; this is not the way. One who is physically strong is conscious of his strength, but one who is spiritually strong is conscious of nothing but weakness. Power with God, in its first element, is the sense of our own weakness. How, then, shall we put on strength? We answer, *On our knees!* No man ever puts on spiritual strength except on his knees. It was there that Jacob found it when he had "power with God and prevailed"; it was there that the apostles found it. When Peter stood forth and preached to the multitude, that day of Pentecost was a day of power: it was the Spirit's power: but how did the apostles put it on? Upon their knees; in those days of prayer, in the upper chamber in Jerusalem. O brethren! it is upon our knees that the Church must now put on its strength! "Awake, awake!" It is God's call. When we ourselves have risen to the consciousness of our need, we may then take hold upon God, and cry, "Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord!" Let us put on the strength of the Word, as the apostle did, when he shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God. Let us put on the strength of the *ministry*, as Paul did when he went forth in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of peace. Let us put on the strength of the *Spirit*, as the early Church did when it was endued with power from on high. Then shall our work be "mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds." Then shall we return from the conflict as Israel did from the pursuit of the Midianites, exclaiming: "The sword of the Lord, the sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" Then shall the Church be "a praise in all the earth,"

and men shall say, "Who is this that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?"

A DEBT OF AGES.—THE CHURCH TO HER CHILDREN.

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Feed My lambs.—John xxi: 15.

WHY are the youth absent during the service of the sanctuary? This was not always thus. Seventeen separate allusions to the duty of the Church to children we find even in the Pentateuch. The following statistics were given the writer by the officers of four of the Central Sunday-schools of Indianapolis: Baptist—of 500 scholars, 50 per cent.; Presbyterian, 370, 17 per cent.; Methodist Episcopal Churches, one, 380, 26 per cent.; another, 379, 27 per cent. These results were had during a clear Sabbath and the holiday attractions. Two interesting statements accompanied them.*

The Baptist brother, during the year past, had been deeply discouraged by the absence of so many of the children of the members. He determined, by the Divine aid, to effect a change. He began to unfold parental duties, and pressing their obligations during nearly the entire year, especially in the social circles. The result has filled him with glad surprise. The family pews were occupied by 250 children, and the face of things seems radically changed, and is now full of hope.

The Meridien Street Methodist Episcopal Church also presented a fact of grave import: Of the eighty children at the morning service, nearly all were baptized offspring of churchly parents; and *one-half of the eighty* were of the in-

* The number given of attendance above would average, on a clear day, about thirty; on both clear and stormy, about fifteen. This would leave in the United States—where the scholars amount to 6,623,124—about 25 per cent. as absent from the morning service habitually. About 4,400,000 of our youth, under Christian weekly training, turning their back on the regular ordinances of God's house!