

THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT WHICH IS THE WORD OF GOD

The Old Testament describes the bonds by which the LORD holds His people in covenant with Himself thus: "My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, from henceforth and for ever" (Isaiah lix. 21). At Pentecost, the ascended Lord poured forth the Holy Spirit to abide continually in, and be the life and guide of, the Church until His own *Parousia*. Thus the Spirit took of the things of Christ and revealed them unto His people, making the blessedness of the Church *there* in glory to be shared by its members *here* on earth, bringing the grace of His sacrifice accepted *then* at the Ascension into our hearts for the remission of sins *now*. The one essential ministry of the Church is the ministry of her Saviour and Lord: for "wherever Christ is, there is the Catholic Church" (Ignatius, *Smyrn.* viii. 2). This invisible Presence of Christ in His Spirit, "He makes effective and evident in the preaching of the Word, in the faithful witness of the Sacraments, in prayer offered in His Name, and through the newness of life whereby He enables the faithful to bear witness to Himself" (*Edinburgh Conference Volume*, p. 231).

Only by a balanced emphasis on the Word and on the Sacraments can God be honoured as the One who both speaks and acts through the means of His own ordering. It is well known that the Churches which look to the Reformation have said *the Word* and the Sacraments,¹ while those which have called themselves Catholic have placed the order rather, *the Sacraments* and the Word. The Reformed tendency is to think of the Sacraments as confirming the Word; the Tridentine is to

¹ So, for example, P. T. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments*, p. 184, writes: "The sacrament of the Word is that which gives value to all other sacraments. They are not ends, they are but means to that grace." T. E. Peck, *Notes on Ecclesiology* (1892), p. 48, says: "The voice of God is the Word; the faith of men is about the word; their life and obedience is the fruit of the word; the order of the church is from the word; the sacraments are the seals and appendices of the word, or a visible word. The word is *vexillum, sceptrum, lux, norma, et statera*." And from the noted Lutheran minister of Bavaria, Herman von Bezzel, we may quote: "The Word has been the first and will remain the first. It does not say, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my sacraments shall not pass away'; but it says, 'But my words shall not pass away. . . .' The Word is the primary thing. The Word was before sacrament and exists without sacrament, and will exist hereafter" (cited by Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 79).

regard the Word as preparatory for the real infusion of grace by the Sacraments.

Current studies are finding baptism mentioned or implied in more places in the New Testament than was formerly realized. This calls for a fuller consideration of the meaning and importance of the Sacrament of initiation, particularly on the part of those who share the Evangelical tradition. On the other hand, this recent research may easily lead to statements which fail to give the Word that significance which it has in the primitive Church.

The final draft of the Faith and Order Section, accepted by the Second Assembly of the World Council at Evanston, declared:

He has given the Scriptures, the preaching of the Word, Baptism and Eucharist by which the Church proclaims the forgiveness of sins and by which, in the power of the Holy Spirit, faith is quickened and nourished.

If this complex sentence be read as asserting for both the preaching of the Word and Baptism the proclamation of forgiveness and the quickening of faith by the Spirit, then each of these *media* of God's gracious ordering receives its due Scriptural meed of honour. On the other hand, if the sentence be so divided as to spell out a doctrine that the preaching of the Word offers to men forgiveness while the Holy Spirit is bestowed in Baptism only,¹ it will run counter to 1 Corinthians i. 17-ii. 5. This article is an assertion that God ministers the Spirit and thereby incorporates believers into Christ and His saving work as truly by the Word as by the Sacraments.

It has been properly pointed out² that each of the Gospels was written, not only after Easter but also after Pentecost. The prophecy of John the Baptist that the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit, preserved in each Gospel (Mark i. 8; Matt. iii. 11; Luke iii. 16; John i. 33), indicates that each was written with the Pentecostal fulfilment of the promise fresh in the minds of the several writers. At His own baptism the Spirit in the form of a dove came upon the Messiah. Jesus inter-

¹ In the preliminary draft presented to the Section on Faith and Order at Evanston, No. 37a, it was twice asserted that the Holy Spirit was bestowed in Baptism, p. 3 (d), p. 6 (a). As to the Word, that draft said: "the Word of God through preaching makes known and offers to men forgiveness and reconciliation by God."

² By Professor Floyd V. Filson, *The New Testament Against Its Environment*.

preted this gift and the subsequent leadership of the Spirit (Luke iii. 22; iv. 1, 14, 18-21) as meaning the fulfilment in Him of the prophecy of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor."

Accordingly, like His forerunner, Jesus came *preaching* the gospel of God (Mark i. 14-15), evangelizing, preaching the good tidings of the Kingdom of God (Luke iv. 43; viii. 1; xvi. 16). In the parable of the sower, the seed of the Kingdom of God is the Word (Luke viii. 10-11). Jesus refused to allow even His ministry of healing to deflect Him from His mission of preaching in other towns also (Mark i. 38).

In His own teaching there was not only the public address to the multitudes but as well the private exposition of the parables to Jesus' disciples (Mark iv. 10 f.; Matt. xiii. 10 f.; Luke viii. 9 f.) and special instruction to them for their ministry in His Name (Mark vi. 7 f.; Matt. ix. 36 f.; Luke ix. 1 f.). This fact, as well as the common prayer, the Lord's Prayer, the Passover Feast culminating in the Last Supper with its appropriate psalms, support the conclusion that our Lord and His disciples were, at times, a distinct group with their own common worship.

Those who came into this inner fellowship of the New Israel gathered about her King-Messiah, even when that King was living the life of a servant-subject, were brought in by the revelation of the glory of the Messiah made to them by the Father (Matt. xvi. 13-18; xj. 25). The gracious heavenly Father is more ready to give the Spirit to those who ask Him than any earthly parent is to give food to his hungry child (Luke xi. 13). And as the revelation by the Father of the Son and by the Son of the Father is in fact God's saving self-revelation to men, Jesus opens the door of this abiding fellowship in oft-reiterated invitation:

Hither to Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden! And I will give you rest (Matt. xi. 25-30; cf. Luke x. 21-22).

The Gospels record the commission to the disciples to preach the Kingdom of God (Matt. ix. 7; Luke ix. 2; x. 9; cf. Mark vi. 7-12) and the promise that "where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst" (Matt. xvii. 20). This gospel of the Kingdom is to be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations (Matt. xxiv. 14); and though

heaven and earth are to pass away, Jesus' words shall not pass away (Matt. xxiv. 35). When Mary sat at Jesus' feet and heard His Word, she chose the one thing needful (Luke x. 42). That Word prepared her to anoint Him for His burial (Mark xiv. 8-9). The risen Jesus promised to be with His disciples as they taught the nations all things He had commanded them (Matt. xxviii. 19-20) and authorized them to preach repentance and remission of sins in His Name (Luke xxiv. 47).

In the Fourth Gospel there is a tremendous emphasis upon the Word and the duty of hearing. Our Lord speaks not of Himself, rather He gives the words the Father gave Him (xvii. 7, 8; xiv. 24, 31; xii. 48-50; vii. 16-17; v. 36-38). Thus His words are spirit and they are life (vi. 63); yea, He has the words of the life of the coming age (vi. 68). To hear His words and believe on the One Who sent the Messiah is to have the life of the age to come (v. 24; xvii. 3). Even the dead shall hear the Voice of the Son of God and live (v. 25). Those who are of the truth hear His Voice (xviii. 37), and His sheep hear His Voice and follow Him (x. 27, 4, 16). Later disciples are to believe on Christ through the word of the first disciples (xvii. 20).

Now this obedient hearing, believing, following comes as the Father teaches them and draws them (vi. 44-45; cf. xii. 32). As Jesus expounds the gospel, He insists that Nicodemus must be born of the Spirit in order to see or to enter the Kingdom of God (iii. 3, 5). The Spirit of truth, the Comforter, is given the disciples to testify of Christ, to convict the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment, to lead into all truth, particularly that which glorifies Christ (xiv. 16, 17, 26; xv. 26; xvi. 7-14). When the risen Lord sends out the disciples even as the Father has sent Him, He accompanies the commission with the gift of the Holy Spirit (xx. 21-22).

According to Acts, the apostles received power after that the Holy Spirit came upon them that they might be Jesus' witnesses (i. 8). Thus, they gave themselves to the ministry of the Word (vi. 4), ceasing not to teach and preach Jesus Christ (v. 42). It is in the power of the Spirit that they preach (ii. 4, 11, 17, 18; iv. 31), and as they speak the Holy Spirit falls on those who hear the word (x. 44; xv. 7-9). The Lord opened the heart of Lydia when she attended to the things spoken of Paul (xvi. 14). Similarly, God used the preaching of the Word to bring men to

faith in Antioch in Pisidia (xiii. 14-49), in Thessalonica (xvii. 2-4) and in Beroea (xvii. 11-12).

The word of the Old Testament prophets had its fulfilment in the sufferings of Christ and the glory that followed as these things were preached by the Apostles with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven—which things angels desire to look into (1 Peter i. 10-12). And by this preached Word of God believers are born again not of corruptible, but of incorruptible seed (i. 23, 25). James calls on his readers to receive the implanted word which is able to save their souls (i. 21; cf. i. 18). The Hebrews are exhorted to remember those that spake unto them the Word of God (xiii. 7), for there is no escape if we neglect the great salvation that was spoken first by the Lord and confirmed by them that heard, God also bearing them witness with signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit (ii. 4). As in Hebrews the Word is sharper than any two-edged sword, and in Ephesians the proclaimed Word is the sword of the Spirit, so in Revelation the sword with which the heavenly Lord rules is the sword which comes out of His mouth (i. 16; xix. 15).

Paul reminded the Thessalonians that the gospel came unto them not in word but in power and in the Holy Spirit; therefore it came in much assurance and in great effectiveness (1 Thess. i. 5-11). They received the apostolic message as "the Word of God which also works in you that believe" (ii. 13). The Galatians received the Spirit by the hearing of faith, not by the works of the law (iii. 2, 5, 14). As Paul preached the Word of the Cross in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, it became the wisdom of God and the power of God to those who believed so that their faith stood not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (1 Cor. i. 17-ii. 5).

The Word of faith which "we" preach to the Romans is nigh them, in their mouths and in their hearts, for faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ (Rom. x. 8, 17). The Word of truth is the gospel of salvation, the preached Word is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. i. 13; vi. 17).¹ God has

¹ S. F. D. Salmond, commenting on Eph. vi. 17, translates, "the spoken Word, the preached Gospel" (*The Expositor's Greek Testament, in loco*). J. Armitage Robinson in his Commentary on Ephesians understands here the Word of God as uttered by the Christians; while Beare in *The Interpreter's Bible*, x. 743-744, aptly suggests: "the sword which is the property of the Spirit", "the sword which the Spirit Himself wields", "the word which God gives us to speak."

manifested His Word through preaching (Tit. i. 3), and as Paul passes off the scene, his commission to Timothy to carry on is phrased in these syllables: **PREACH THE WORD.**

We thus conclude that our Lord Jesus Christ accompanies with His Spirit the faithful proclamation of His Word. In this way faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ, sinners are saved, the sheep are called by the Shepherd into the fold. As the Spirit uses this ministry of the Word, believers participate in the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke xxiv. 46-47; Acts xvi. 31, 32; x. 36; xi. 20; Rom. i. 3; 1 Cor. ii. 2; iii. 11; 1 Tim. i. 15); in Christ crucified (1 Cor. i. 23; ii. 2; xv. 3; 2 Cor. v. 18-21; Gal. iii. 1; 1 Peter i. 11-12; ii. 24); risen (Rom. x. 9; 1 Thess. i. 10; 1 Cor. xv. 4 f.; 2 Tim. ii. 8; Acts iv. 33); interceding (John xvii. 20; Rom. viii. 34; Heb. vii. 25; 1 John ii. 1); reigning (Acts ii. 32-33; v. 31-32; 1 Cor. xii. 3b), and coming in glory (1 Cor. i. 6-9; 1 Thess. i. 10; iv. 15 f.; 2 Thess. i. 9-10; Tit. ii. 12-13).

For "of HIM are ye in Christ Jesus, Who is made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, as it is written, He that glories, in the Lord let him glory" (1 Cor. i. 30).

If this article be put into thesis form it could run thus:

GOD has dealt with His people in sundry ways. In the course of these dealings He has continually spoken His word to them, first through the Prophets, finally in His Son, thereafter by the teaching and preaching of Jesus Christ—crucified, risen, ascended, interceding, returning (Hebrews, 1 Corinthians). The Father revealed Himself in His grace and truth, by speaking His eternal Word to men in Jesus Christ (John i). The Messiah carried on His ministry as a wandering teacher, preaching the gospel of God's reign of grace (Mark i. 14-15). The ascended Lord is the Evangelist, preaching to those near and far, peace with God and man (Eph. ii. 17). The Good Shepherd calls the sheep of His flock by name, and being effectually called they participate in Him and in His salvation (John x. 1-30). This call is sounded forth by the proclamation of the Word, and is made effectual by the inward working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the hearers (Acts, especially x. 44; xvi. 14).

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