

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OPERATION

"... No part dark" (Luke 11:36)

FOR long the conviction has remained with all true thinking men that the great need of the Christian Church is a revival of practical Christianity or godly living. The situation that confronts us today calls aloud for that witness. Was it not Gladstone who said: "My only hope for the world is in bringing the human mind into contact with Divine revelation through practical Christianity"?

Glover tells us that the early Christian Church conquered because the Christians of those days out-thought, outlived, and outdied the pagan, i.e., they showed a quality of life that is impossible apart from Jesus Christ.

I want you to consider with me three aspects of the life suggested in this passage, namely, the life that is possessed by God.

1. It is a Life that is Luminous: It gives light, so the candle has to be on a candlestick, but note, for what purpose? -that they who come in may see (v.33). "This," said Dr. Henry Drummond, "is the stupendous victory and mystery of regeneration, that mortal man should suggest to the world GOD!" Here let me illustrate by an incident during the first wave of the Lewis revival. A group of students anxious to visit the scene of the revival, joined a company who were travelling by bus to Barvas Parish Church. Just before leaving, one suggested that they should invite another student who, until then, had shown little interest in the revival, and on being invited, she declined. A remarkable thing happened on the way to the church. The Spirit of God began to move in the bus, and quite a number came under His power and became deeply concerned about the salvation of their souls. That night, among those who came to know the Saviour, were five students from the town. On returning they again felt constrained to visit this young woman who had previously declined their invitation, so they called in the early hours of the morning. She was not at all happy at being disturbed at such an unearthly hour, but in giving her testimony in the city of Edinburgh, she said, "When they came into my room I saw and heard something that could not be explained on the basis of the human, and I went all out in search of that some-thing, and found it when Christ found me in Barvas Parish Church."

Why do I tell that story? Surely to illustrate what I mean by the life that is luminous. Something was seen that "could not be explained on the basis of the human." And is that not what Christ meant when He said, "Ye are the light of the world" (Matt. 5.14), by which He would have us understand that by character and conduct we are to represent Him to men? In this connection I frequently quote the Rev. Murray

McCheyne who, in describing a Christian says: "The Christian is just a person who makes it easy for others to believe in God." The great need of the Christian Church today is not, as some suggest, a restatement of our creed, nor a new approach in the field of evangelism; but a practical exhibition of godly living. If we who profess the name of Jesus are living the Christian life, we are the greatest evidence that can be furnished. It was Pascal who said: "I saw that everything that came to pass in the life of Christ must be repeated in the lives of His followers." Gurnall sets this truth in clear light in his statement, "Say not that thou hast royal blood in thy veins; say not that thou art born of God if thou canst not prove thy pedigree by daring to be holy!" Yes, the best argument for Christianity is a consistent Christian life. There is no argument against the silent eloquence of holiness.

I remember some years ago sailing past a lighthouse and coming away with the conviction that it is the light that matters. The lighthouse itself was imposing, the structure the work of a master; but that edifice could be as treacherous as the rock on which it was built but for the light. It was the light and not the structure that gave warning and direction. It is not merely what I say, nor what I do, but what I am that matters: that is the witness that is convincing. I have always believed that the greatest thing about us all is our unconscious influence, and that unconscious influence impregnated by the life of Jesus, should bring to mind the great saying of the Apostle: "That the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4.11). I remember hearing the late Principal J. D. Drysdale say: "We accomplish more by our radiations than by our exhortations." May God make us luminous Christians!

2. It is a Life that is Transparent: Jesus speaks of it as the life that has "no part dark." That, to me, is one of the finest definitions of Full Salvation. Surely that is what David meant when he said, "Thou shalt make me to know wisdom," but note where-"in the inward parts" (Psalm 5 I. 6). I believe that the great work of the Holy Spirit is in the deep regions of our personality which can only be illumined by the light of God. John Bunyan suggests that great care should be taken in searching the dark passages round Free-Will Fortress, as it is possible for men, little of stature to hide there, awaiting their opportunity to open the gates; suggesting that there can be no safety until every avenue of our personality comes under the searching light of the beam of God. Within the range of that light surely there can be no part dark. Here I would ask the question - does Christ hold the key of every avenue, or are there still regions of your life that are not transparent?

I think it true to say that many of us have proceeded upon a false basis. We have conceived of the Christian life as an imitation of Christ: it is not an imitation but a participation. To quote William Law: "Until we are renewed in the spirit of our mind and illumined in every part, our very virtues are but taught practices grafted upon a corrupt bottom," and I think this is what Principal Denny had in his mind when he

spoke of the "conscious theology of the atonement, suggesting the delivering power of the redemptive work of Jesus as being at the very centre of our being.

Let us be assured of this, that the death of Jesus reaches down underneath the deepest sins human nature ever committed. This surely is "the light that marks the road that leads men to the Lamb." It is the light of atonement made, of purity assured, of sins for ever cleansed. Come, then, and as you come, discover that what the light reveals, the precious blood can heal.

I remember many years ago listening to the late Dr. Stuart Holden, who was addressing a meeting at Keswick, and speaking of the precious blood, he said: "Come and let the healing, cleansing rays of Calvary play upon your hearts until the very seed of evil is sterilized."

Here I may also quote another Keswick speaker, the Rev. Hector MacKinnon of Shettleston: "Some men are experts at pruning, but I believe in a Saviour who can deal with both root and branch," and surely such statements can be backed up by Scripture. I think of Paul's great passage in his letter to the Romans: "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Is he not speaking here of two governing principles-that of "sin and death" on the one hand, and the "law of the Spirit" on the other?

The thing of interest to note is that he speaks of being made free, and I would suggest that this is something deeper than mere counteraction or suppression. Surely, if we want to honour God we must give Him full credit for the excellency of His work in redemption-a Saviour who can save from all sin. I am never tired of quoting a verse which we frequently sing:

"Holiness by faith in Jesus,
Not by effort of thine own;
Sin's dominion crushed and broken,
By the power of grace alone".

This is surely where we realize the wonder of God's saving grace. I would draw attention to a truth we do not always take to heart: in sanctification as well as in regeneration, God must speak to us in His own voice. When face to face with our desperate need we gaze at salvation promises such as: "But as many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name" (John 1.12), and, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1.9). But the word on paper must be imparted into our consciousness, i.e., it must rather be spoken into us by the power of the Holy Ghost. No honest soul would be satisfied with a dead, legal

imputation of holiness. Nothing short of God revealing Himself in me and speaking His word of deliverance and assurance will answer to my deep need. Someone has said: "The Redeemer who loved us from eternity and formed us for Himself will not leave the pining soul to the second-hand tinkering of others: He will closet us in with Himself."

I believe God longs to give to each of us a perfect, personal assurance of His perfect salvation, yet how few seem to realize this, and in this connection words from the diary of David Brainerd might be quoted: "My discourse was suited to my own case, for of late I have found a great want of apprehension of Divine grace, and have often been greatly distressed in my soul because I did not suitably apprehend this fountain opened to purge away sin, and so I have had to be labouring for spiritual life and peace of conscience in my own strength. But now God showed me in some measure the arm of strength and fountain of all grace." Let me point out that this is the secret of holiness that even earnest souls often miss. This is particularly true of many in our Highlands and Islands. They magnify law rather than grace. They see the exceeding sinfulness of sin and forget the omnipotent Saviour; they deplore the guilt and stain, but do not extol the blood. Oh, that we might move out of sentiment and believe in reality that God has said it: it must be true that there is a Saviour from all sin.

But do I hear someone say: "Can He meet me at the point of my need?"³ Let me tell the following story: Paul Murphy, a former world-champion chess player was being shown over an art gallery when his gaze was arrested by a peculiar picture. The artist had depicted a chessboard as a symbol of the game of life with the contest almost concluded. On one side sat a young man with a look of despair on his face. On the other, sat a representation of Satan gloating over his helpless victim. Murphy stood, looked intently at the picture and then cried: "Bring me a chessboard; I can save him yet!" His knowledge of chess was better than the artist's, and he saw a way out of the young man's dilemma.

There are those today in the Christian Church who have tried every move to make success of their Christian profession, but they have failed-and failed utterly. Might I say that the voice of Christ comes ringing over the field of our defeat, our ways of frustration and baffling, with this cry of assurance, 'I can save you yet!' God has an answer to every checkmate in life. Did I not believe this I would never stand on a holiness platform again! God has the answer, and the answer is in the blood of Christ. We poor creatures are so often found reasoning on the basis of what is possible to human nature. Holiness is not human life brought up to the highest level of development, but Divine life brought down to the lowest level of condescension.

We must ever remember that the Cross is not only the fundamental basis in the sinner's conversion, but also the fundamental instrument in the believer's

sanctification. The one aspect brings deliverance from sin's condemnation, but the other from sin's power; so we proclaim victory through the blood.

During the South African War, the British forces were suffering from a series of setbacks. A Minister of State visited Queen Victoria and poured out his sad complaint. The little Queen pulled herself up to her full height and looked her minister in the face saying, "Sir we are not interested in the possibilities of defeat; we are only interested in victory." And that is where we stand in our proclamation of this glorious truth. So may this be our prayer:

"I want a principle within,
A jealous, godly fear;
A sensibility of sin,
A pain to feel it near.

"Quick as the apple of an eye,
O God, my conscience make;
Awake my soul when sin is nigh,
And keep it still awake.

"O, may the least omission pain
My well instructed soul;
And drive me to the blood again,
Which makes the wounded whole".

3. It is a Life that is Burning: It speaks of vision and passion. But I have to remind you that the light that glows burns on the altar of sacrifice. My witness becomes effective only when it touches Calvary. How easy it is to give up every wrong habit but one, but it is that one that tells whether you are crucified with Christ or not. If we are to share in the suffering, in the labours and triumphs of Christ, we ourselves must incarnate the spirit of Calvary. Let us not forget that the Cross that called Jesus to a sacrificial death called His disciples to a sacrificial life. The whole attitude of a God-possessed life is that I give up my right to myself. Let us never forget that the bedrock of a God honouring Christian experience is passionate, personal devotion to Jesus Christ, and that devotion expressed in the sacrificial giving up of myself. Is that the life you desire? If so, then let this be your prayer:

"From subdue love of softening things,
From easy choices, weakenings;
Not thus are spirits fortified,
Not this way went the crucified.

From all that dims Thy Calvary,
Oh, Lamb of God, deliver me.

"Give me the love that leads the way,
The faith that nothing can dismay;
The hope no disappointment tires,
The passion that will burn like fire.
Let me not sink to be a clod,
Make me Thy fuel, flame of God".

Amy Carmichael