

SPIRITUAL EQUIPMENT FOR SPIRITUAL WORK

Church Association Tract 205

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To “warn”—as well as to “teach”—is a very important part of the work which has been committed to the ministers of Christ’s Gospel. Before we were admitted to the office of Presbyter, we were solemnly reminded by the chief Pastor that we were going to undertake the duties of “Watchmen,” and we were impressively exhorted to be faithful and diligent in discharging them. We must carefully and prayerfully strive to “discern the signs of the times”—reading them in the light which the teaching of God’s Holy Word, and the guidance of God’s Blessed Spirit cast upon them—and when we see the existence, or the approach of any special error or evil, we must plainly and loudly warn those whom it concerns, and urge them to use such precautions as will be likely to help to protect them from the mischief, and harm, and loss which threaten.

There seems to exist in the present day, a very real, and a very great error, which widely prevails, greatly influences, and grievously misleads many professing Christians. I refer to a tendency to undervalue and ignore the spiritual element in personal religion, and almost—if not altogether—to eliminate and exclude it from the service which we ought to render to, and the work which we ought to do for, our Master who is in heaven.

A strong belief that this error does exist, and does work, leads me to feel bound to warn against it, and to present the opposite truth which alone can counteract it, as opportunity may allow and occasion require. And so, having accepted the invitation to address you to-day, I resolved that this should be the subject to which I would ask your attention—“*Spiritual equipment for spiritual work.*”

The word “equipment” is used in a wide sense, intended to include the very necessary preliminary of preparing and qualifying the worker himself for engaging in work for God, as well as furnishing him with what will fit him for it and aid him in it, and enable him to prosecute it with efficiency and success.

Does it, to any of you, sound strangely—perhaps, even seem “a hard saying”—that preparing and qualifying the worker himself are needed?

Very often work is undertaken without any such thought occurring to the mind, and, wherever that is the case, there, at the very outset, the error already referred to, has a place.

“What saith the Scripture?” Remember those earnest words addressed by St. Paul to Timothy, when giving him directions for his guidance in his work. “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine.” *First*, “Thyself”; *then*, “the doctrine.” *First*, see to “thyself;” *then*, work for others. *First*, be right; *then*, teach right.

Remember, too, the grave charge which, on a very solemn occasion, our Blessed Master Himself gave to St. Peter, with reference to the life’s work upon which he was about to enter: “When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” *First*, the work within thyself; *then*, the work for others. *First*, have thine own heart right with God; *then*, strive to bring others to know, and trust, and love, and serve Him. *First*, be converted; *then*, try to help others. It is important that we shall clearly see how emphatically, and how impressively, God’s Word presents this view to us.

“They that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be

that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.” “Abide in Me,” the Saviour said, “and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in Me. He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for apart from Me ye can do nothing.”

The sinner, in his natural, unconverted, unregenerate condition, has a double disqualification, and disability for serving and pleasing God. He is spiritually dead, and he is under condemnation. So that, on both these accounts, he cannot render any service, or do any work, which God will regard, or receive, with favour. Even if he were able to will, or to do—still, there would not be any ground on which he could rest a hope that his work would be accepted or approved by God. But, when the sinner receives the Saviour, in the gracious and glorious offices in which He reveals Himself to us in the Blessed Gospel—receives Him really and truly, and faithfully, and heartily—receives Him, resting every hope for time and for eternity upon Him, and Him alone—*then*, that sinner is not only pardoned, but justified: not merely freed from condemnation, but “born again,” by the regenerating influence and operation of the Holy Spirit. He is converted to God, united to Christ, inhabited by the Spirit.

The previous disability and disqualification are removed. *Now*, he is “alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” He is “accepted in the beloved,” and God approves and accepts his “bounden duty and service,” for the Saviour’s sake. Not only has he the powers, and capacities, and faculties of the living, which enable him to serve God—he is also “a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master’s use, and prepared unto every good work”—because he is now a spiritual person, made so by the spiritual life infused into him by the Holy Spirit Who dwells within. Thus, the first step towards the needful equipment for working for God, is taken by the *Worker becoming spiritual*.

Then, it is very necessary to have a clear and correct apprehension of the work which has to be done.

We are considering “spiritual equipment for spiritual work.” What is “spiritual work?” In the mind of many Christians, the idea is strictly limited to such matters as are professedly and nominally connected with religion.

If we had but Faith, that spiritual faculty which gives an insight into the invisible, we should see that every duty which comes to us in the common course of our daily life has its spiritual aspect and its spiritual bearing.

God says to us, “Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” God tells us that we are duly and diligently to discharge the various relative duties which devolve upon us, “with good will doing service as to the Lord, and not” merely “unto men.” God sets it before us as an object of aspiration, not so much to “do some great thing” for Him sometimes, or even often, as “that God in all things may be glorified” in us and by us. God bids us to regard as His appointment for us the ordinary work which comes to us, day by day, in the position in the world in which He has placed us. And He charges us to do that work, whatever it be, as to Him and for Him. It may itself seem very trifling and very humble. It may really be very human and very mundane; but, when seen in its due relation to God, and done with direct reference to God, it assumes a character which it never had before. It acquires a spiritual significance, a spiritual interest, a spiritual importance; and with the desire to do the allotted work well, and as it ought to be done, there also arises a profound sense of inability in self, and of the urgent need of help to “serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.”

“Who is sufficient for these things? We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves,” is quite as much an expression of human experience as it is a truth of Divine Revelation.

And so is the cheering utterance which sounds so sweetly to the tried, and tempted, and troubled,

but trusting servant: “Our sufficiency is of God.” It is a Divine supply, and it is surely given. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.” And it is God the Holy Ghost who administers God’s “manifold gifts of grace,” “dividing to every man severally as He will.”

So St. Paul prayed for the Ephesians that they might be “strengthened with might by God’s Spirit inwardly.” There was the source from which their strength was to be drawn—the presence, the influence, the energy of the Holy Spirit within them—enlightening the understanding, convincing the reason, engaging the affections, subduing the will, and bringing the whole being into willing and loving submission and devotion to God.

And not only did the Apostle thus pray for them, he also earnestly charged them to “be filled with the Spirit.” They were to yield entirely to His influence, to submit themselves “wholly to His Holy Will,” and to follow His guidance “with full purpose and steadfastness of heart.”

And what God said by St. Paul to the Ephesians, He says quite as clearly to us now—“Be filled with the Spirit.”

Let Him take up His abode within us. Welcome Him to reign and rule there. Let the thoughts, feelings, aims, hopes, motives, methods, words, deeds be all submitted to Him and placed under His control.

The Holy Spirit came into the world to be The Paraclete—The Helper. He is willing to be this to every one of us. Each one of us may, if we will, have this Divine Friend dwelling within us; always accessible, always available, always able and willing to attend to our appeal to Him, and to give to us just the help which, at any moment, we require; by suggesting to us what we ought to do; showing us how we ought to do it; inclining and enabling us to follow His directions; and giving to us always strength according to our day, and grace suitable and sufficient for every “time of need.”

The “wisdom of God” to guide us; the “power of God” to fortify us; the “strength of God” to sustain us; the “peace of God” to comfort us; the “love of God” to cheer us; all this, and far more than all this—more than man’s heart can conceive—is the “Spiritual equipment” which God places at our disposal, and, in His Holy Word, urges us diligently and faithfully to adopt and employ, for the warfare and the work to which He calls us.

“Be *filled* with the Spirit.” Not merely taught, or guided, or influenced by the Spirit. “*Filled* with the Spirit.” Not endowed with these or those gifts and graces of the Spirit; but endued with *Him Himself*. “Filled with *the Spirit*.”

That which is filled has no room for any addition. If we were “filled with the Spirit,” everything offensive to God and injurious to ourselves would be absolutely expelled and excluded from us. No selfish motives, no wrong principles, no impure desires, no low ambitions would ever have place within us. Whilst all that is “honest and lovely, and of good report,” would increase, and abound, and strengthen, and spread, both in our character within, and also in our conduct towards those around us. What would our prayers be—we always “Praying in the Holy Ghost?” What would our study of God’s Holy Word be to us, with the Holy Spirit always our Teacher? What would Preaching and Hearing be, with the Holy Spirit always guiding and helping those who Preach, and opening and preparing the hearts and minds of those who Hear? What would the Services in God’s House be if all always worshipped “in Spirit and in Truth?” What would our Communion with God be to us with nothing ever to disturb, or distract, or interfere?

Walking “in newness of life”; serving “in newness of spirit”; enriched with “the unsearchable riches of Christ;” “filled with all the fulness of God;” our “Spiritual equipment” would surely be perfect and complete indeed; and we should indeed be efficient and successful workers for God if we were always “filled with the Holy Ghost;” always animated by Him, having His in-dwelling presence;

always actuated by Him, using His out-working power.

Do you say that this is a high ideal? Certainly it is; and it ought to be. If we propose to ourselves a low ideal, our aim will be low, and our attainments and achievements will be lower still. If we erect for ourselves a high ideal, and our desires are sincere, our aim will be high, and God will bless our honest efforts to serve Him, by giving such success as He deems right, enabling us to please Him both in Will and Deed, and accepting with approval what we do for Him, for our dear Saviour's sake.

But the selection of an ideal does not rest with us. God Himself sets one before us; and this is how He presents it to us: "Be filled with the Spirit."

"Ye see your calling, brethren."

God help us all to "give diligence to make our calling and election sure," and always to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called!"

"Spirit of purity and grace,
Our weakness, pitying, see;
O make our hearts Thy dwelling place,
And filled with Thee!"