

Changing Cleveland One By One

Bishop Stephen D. Lewis

The Power of the Word

slighted the invitation of mercy, and done despite to the Spirit of grace. The most common manifestation of the sin against the Holy Spirit is in persistently slighting Heaven's invitation to repent. Every step in the rejection of Christ is a step toward the rejection of salvation, and toward the sin against the Holy Spirit.

Christ has promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to His church, and the promise belongs to us as much as to the first disciples. But like every other promise, it is given on conditions. There are many who believe and profess to claim the Lord's promise; they talk about Christ and about the Holy Spirit, yet receive no benefit. They do not surrender the soul to be guided and controlled by the divine agencies. We cannot use the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is to use us. Through the Spirit God works in His people "to will and to do of His good pleasure." Phil. 2:13. But many will not submit to this. They want to manage themselves. This is why they do not receive the heavenly gift. Only to those who wait humbly upon God, who watch for His guidance and grace, is the Spirit given. The power of God awaits their demand and reception. This promised blessing, claimed by faith, brings all other blessings in its train. It is given according to the riches of the grace of Christ, and He is ready to supply every soul according to the capacity to receive.

What is justification by faith? It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself. When men see their own nothingness, they are prepared to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. {*The Faith I Live By* Pg. 111}

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"As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

The earth can bring forth vegetation only because of the moisture that comes upon it by the rain or the snow from heaven. Without this, everything would fade and perish. So also is it with the life of man and the word of God. Without the word of God the life of man is as barren of power and of good as is the earth without rain. But only let the word of God fall upon the heart as the showers upon the earth; then the life will be fresh and beautiful in the joy and peace of the Lord, and fruitful with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ.

Notice, too, it is not you who are to do that which he pleases; but, "It shall accomplish that which I please," You are not to read or hear the word of God, and say, I must do that, I will do that. You are to open the heart to that word, that it may accomplish the will of God in you. It is not you who are to do it, but it. "It", the word of God itself, is to do it, and you are to let it. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you."

This is stated in another place thus: "When ye receive the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." Thus it is the word of God that must work in you. You are not to work to do the word of God: the word of God is to work in you to cause you to do. "Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily."

The word of God being living and full of power, when it is allowed to work in the life, there will be powerful work wrought in that individual. As this word is the word of God, the power, of which is full, is only the power of God; and when that word is allowed to work in the life, there will be the work of God manifested in the life-it is his power working mightily. And thus it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. "It shall accomplish that which I please." Let it.

From these scriptures it is plain that we are expected to look upon the word of God only as self-fulfilling. The word of God is self-fulfilling. This is the great

truth presented everywhere in the Bible. This is the difference between the word of God and the word of men. And this is just the difference emphasized in the passage that says, "When ye received the word of God,...ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

There is no power in the word of a man to do what it says. Whatever may be the man's ability to accomplish what he says, there is no power in the man's word itself to accomplish what he says. A man's word may express the easiest possible thing for him to accomplish, and you may thoroughly believe it, yet it is altogether dependent upon the man himself to accomplish it apart from his word. It is not his word that does it. It is he himself that must do it; and this just as really as though he had spoken no word at all. Such is the word of men.

It is not so with the word of God. When the word is spoken by the Lord, there is at that moment in that word the living power to accomplish what the word expresses. It is not needed that the Lord employ any shadow of any other means than that word itself to accomplish what the word says. The Bible is full of illustrations of this, and they are written to teach us this very thing, -that we shall look upon the word as the word of God, and not as the word of men; and that we may receive it thus as it is in truth, the word of God, that it may work effectually in us the will and good pleasure of God.

"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.... For he spake, and it was." "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." At first there were no worlds at all. More than this, there was none of the materials of which the worlds are made. There was nothing. Then God spoke, and all the worlds were in their places. From whence came the worlds, then? Before he spoke, there were none; after he spoke, there they were. Whence, then, did they come? What produced them? What produced the material of which they are composed? What caused them to exist? It was the word which was spoken that did it all. And this word did it all, because it was the word of God. There was in that word the divinity of life and spirit, the creative power, to do all that the word expressed. Such is the word of God.

"And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." The word of God in the Bible is the same,-the same in life, in spirit, in creative power,-precisely the same, as that word that made the heavens and all the host of them. It was Jesus Christ who spoke the word at creation; it is he who speaks the word in the Bible. At creation the word which he spoke made the worlds; in the Bible the word which

he speaks saves and sanctifies the soul. In the beginning the word which he spoke created the heavens and the earth; in the Bible the word which he speaks creates in Christ Jesus the man who receives that word. In both places, and everywhere in the work of God, it is the word that does it.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Receive it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you. Then, "as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." "To you is the word of this salvation sent." "And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able [literally, 'full of power'] to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." (Alonzo T. Jones, *Review and Herald* 1896/10/20)

When the soul surrenders itself to Christ, a new power takes possession of the new heart. A change is wrought which man can never accomplish for himself. It is a supernatural work, bringing a supernatural element into human nature. The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is impregnable to the assaults of Satan. But unless we do yield ourselves to the control of Christ, we shall be dominated by the wicked one. We must inevitably be under the control of the one or the other of the two great powers that are contending for the supremacy of the world. It is not necessary for us deliberately to choose the service of the kingdom of darkness in order to come under its dominion. We have only to neglect to ally ourselves with the kingdom of light. If we do not co-operate with the heavenly agencies, Satan will take possession of the heart, and will make it his abiding place. The only defense against evil is the indwelling of Christ in the heart through faith in His righteousness. Unless we become vitally connected with God, we can never resist the unhallowed effects of self-love, self-indulgence, and temptation to sin. We may leave off many bad habits, for the time we may part company with Satan; but without a vital connection with God, through the surrender of ourselves to Him moment by moment, we shall be overcome. Without a personal acquaintance with Christ, and a continual communion, we are at the mercy of the enemy, and shall do his bidding in the end.

"The last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so," said Jesus, "shall it be also unto this wicked generation." There are none so hardened as those who have