

themselves much with the mysteries of the Trinity, so far as the inner distinctions of the Godhead are concerned; but the vital relationships with men, and the vital activities and operations among men, of the one God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, were to them realities. And after Christ's ascension, it was the Holy Spirit, or God as a spirit in actual touch with the spirits of men, who was felt to hold

The Most Vital Relationship

to the work of the Church. It was He that was now with men to fulfil the purpose of the Father and to carry forward the work of Christ to its application and fulfillment in the salvation of men. Looking back over the process of revelation and the progressive development of God's Kingdom on earth, we are obliged to see three distinct periods which might be called the dispensations of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The first two were preparatory, each containing a promise of something better still to come. In the first period, after a long continued movement of Divine revelation and education, the promise or hope of the Messiah was held out to Israel. In the fulness of time this hope was fulfilled in Christ, and Christ in turn held out to His followers the hope and promise of the Spirit. Before His death He said to His disciples, "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away the Paraclete (Helper, Comforter) will not come unto you." He had previously told them that this Paraclete, "The Spirit of truth," was to come to "abide with them" and to be "in them." Before His ascension He told them to wait in Jerusalem for the fulfillment of this promise, saying, "Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you." On the day of Pentecost these words were fulfilled, and the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, in which we now live, was ushered in. The name is appropriate, however, not because the Holy Spirit was not in the world before and never wrought before, and not because God the Father and Christ the Son are not in as real and vital relations to men now as ever, but simply because the realization through the Spirit of the divine life in man, for which Christ's life prepared the way, is the characteristic divine operation of this age. It is a blessed privilege to live as we do in this time of the Spirit, for the best that God can do for humanity and for the world can now be realized. But Paul's injunction to the Galatians may be as necessary now as then: "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." Let us in our actual life and work place the emphasis aright, not on the outward and formal and human, but on the inward and spiritual and divine. Religion is not ritual and show, but spirit and life. True, there must be men, means, machinery, organization and effort of various kind, forming a physical basis for the spirit and life of the Church of God in the world, but all will be powerless and fruitless unless pervaded and energized by the Holy Spirit. The merely human spirit may produce a certain amount of activity and movement, but it is only the activity of an electrified corpse.

In seeking a more practical recognition of the Holy Spirit as the true principle and power of a religious life, it will help us to remember that there can be no unwillingness on the part of God to come thus into the life of humanity. He made man for union and fellowship with Himself. His attitude is that of a father who loves us with a perfect love and therefore seeks for us the highest good. He cannot be unwilling to im-

part to us, as His children, that goodness which is His own glory, and the glory of all moral beings. But we must also remember that He cannot live in us or work for us in any arbitrary, mechanical or magical way, but by an unconscious blending with our spirits, and in and through our own moral faculties, and with due regard to the spiritual freedom with which He endowed us. Our own effort will therefore be as necessary as if everything depended on ourselves. But, first of all, our spiritual attitude towards God must be such as to render the working of His spirit in and with our spirits possible and natural.

The most vital element in this attitude is faith. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him." It is doubtless true that the Spirit is himself active in producing the very attitudes upon which this work is conditioned—one of the blessed paradoxes of the higher life. "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief." "The Lord, the Spirit" is the ever-present Helper upon whom we can cast ourselves in every effort to do the will of God and meet the

Conditions of Divine Blessing.

But faith, as the spiritual apprehension and realization of the unseen verities, and as the personal exercise of confidence and trust in a personal God and Saviour, is the great and indispensable condition of blessing and power. "According to your faith be it done unto you." "All things are possible to him that believeth." "Lord, increase our faith."

Self-surrender is also a vital requirement in man's relation to God. Opposite will cannot work in harmony. In order to rich and full life "in the spirit," men must "submit themselves" to God; the soul must come to that point where it can say, "God, work Thy will in me; I am Thine, do with me and in me as Thou wilt, for Thy will is my good as well as my law." It is then that the Spirit can gloriously "fill" us and use us.

In seeking "the Spirit-filled life," it is also important to remember that the union with God in which it is realized gives our life a certain moral quality, which will therefore depend upon *character and conduct*—upon personality. We cannot possess the Spirit and reject the moral qualities of that Spirit in our personal life. We must recognize the fact that when God comes into our life He comes as the Holy Spirit and as the Spirit of love, for "God is love." That life has the largest measure of the presence and power of the Spirit that has most of the holiness and love of God. We grieve and quench the Spirit by every form of baseness and wrongdoing, but perhaps most of all by our selfishness and lack of love. When we seek His presence and power in our own souls and in our Churches, let us not forget the great manifestation of that presence will be love.

We also find the Spirit spoken of in the word as

"The Spirit of Truth".

an expression which suggests to us that He works in harmony with truth, or reality, by means of truth, and with a view to truth. It is part of His work to "guide us into all truth," that is, moral and spiritual truth, "the truth as it is in Jesus." And we are also told that "the Word of God," or, the truth, is "the sword of the Spirit." Large and accurate knowledge is not a condition of salvation, or even of spiritual power, but doubtless the more men's thoughts correspond with reality, the freer and fuller will be the work and influence of God's Spirit in their souls. The life of the Church and its work in the world will not be what they should be until better means are adopted for

producing a more general acquaintance with Bible truth. The pulpit and Sabbath School are not sufficient. The home and the common school must be made to do their share—by far the largest share. Nor is the mere reading of the Bible enough. Facilities should be provided for the proper understanding of it. Much tittle is sometimes heard about the virtue of reading the Bible itself rather than books about the Bible. Both should be read, with a view to understanding the former. "Scripture is the sense of Scripture." Perhaps not one out of a hundred ordinary readers of the Bible can get at the heart of even the simplest passages and read them with full profit, without some help. What a boon to any family would be a set of "The Expositor's Bible," so well adapted to the general reader!

So far as the pulpit is concerned, its main business is to "preach the Word." It is a mistake to think that doctrinal preaching is not so practical as ethical preaching, and not so well suited to the needs of this age. The two never can be separated, for

True Conduct and Character

must be rooted in doctrine—the living doctrines of the Word which are always *practical*, because vitally related to life. The external forms in which truth is presented, and the external methods of carrying on religious work must change, more or less, without changing conditions, but the fundamental verities remain the same, and the fundamental needs of human nature and human life are ever the same. Christ promised that when the Spirit came He would "convince the world concerning sin, concerning righteousness, and concerning judgment." These same convictions the world needs to-day as much as ever, and to be in line with the Spirit's work for the world, great verities with their related Gospel facts and truths must be preached. Preaching that puts the main stress upon "questions of the day," or that seeks out odd texts and sensational subjects in order to "draw" or attract notice, will not deepen the spiritual life, build up true character, or save the world.

It is hardly necessary to dwell upon the place of prayer in relation to the Spirit. "If ye then, being evil, know to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" Its relation to the Pentecostal outpouring is well known. The power of prayer is quite generally acknowledged. Yet when we look at Christ's promises and practice with regard to it, we cannot but wonder whether it is a power that the Church of God has ever yet learned to use rightly or fully, and whether we have grasped the full significance of Christ's all-night vigils. Doubtless

"More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of."

"For so the wide round earth is every way bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

Certainly.

An excitable preacher, fond of illustrating his address by examples from nature, was the other day holding forth to his congregation upon the duties of forbearance and brotherly love, in which matters he declared us to be inferior to the animal world. He took as his justification for this statement the story of two goats which met one another upon a very narrow bridge over a river, so that they could not pass by without the one thrusting the other off. "How do you think they acted?" asked the parson fervently. "I'll tell you. One laid down, and let the other leap over him. Oh, beloved, let us live like goats!"