**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**1 CORINTHIANS-021**. **THE UNIVERSAL GIFT by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal."*

*1 Corinthians 12:7*

The great fact which to-day [Whitsunday] commemorates is too often regarded as if it were a transient gift, limited to those on whom it was first bestowed. We sometimes hear it said that the great need of the Christian world is a second Pentecost, a fresh outpouring of the Spirit of God and the like. Such a way of thinking and speaking misconceives the nature and significance of the first Pentecost, which had a transient element in it, but in essence was permanent. The rushing mighty wind and the cloven tongues of fire, and the strange speech in many languages, were all equally transient. The rushing wind swept on, and the house was no more filled with it. The tongues flickered into invisibility and disappeared from the heads. The hubbub of many languages was quickly silent. But that which these things but symbolised is permanent; and we are not to think of Pentecost as if it were a sudden gush from a great reservoir, and the sluice was let down again after it, but as if it were the entrance into a dry bed, of a rushing stream, whose first outgush was attended with noise, but which thereafter flows continuous and unbroken. If churches or individuals are scant of that gift, it is not because it has not been bestowed, but because it has not been accepted.

My text tells us two things: it unconditionally and broadly asserts that every Christian possesses this great gift--the manifestation is given to every man; and then it asserts that the gift of each is meant to be utilised for the good of all. The manifestation is given to every man to profit withal.

**I. Let me, then, say a word or two, to begin with, about the universality of this gift.**

Now, that is implied in our Lord's own language, as commented upon by the Evangelist. For Jesus Christ declared that this was the standing law of His kingdom, to be universally applied to all its members, that He that believeth on Him, out of him shall flow rivers of living water; and the Evangelist's comment goes on to say, This spake He of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive. There is the condition and the qualification. Wherever there is faith, there the Spirit of God is bestowed, and bestowed in the measure in which faith is exercised. So, then, in full accordance with such fundamental principles in reference to the gift of the Spirit of God, comes the language of my text, and of many another text to which I cannot do more than refer. But let me just quote one or two of them, in order that I may make more emphatic what I believe a great many Christian people do not realise as they ought--viz. that the gift of God's Holy Spirit is not a thing to be desired, as if it were not possessed or confined to select individuals, or manifested by exceptional and lofty attainments, but is the universal heritage of the whole Christian Church. Know ye not that ye are the temple of the Holy Ghost? We have all been made to drink into one Spirit, says Paul again, in the immediate context. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His, says he, unconditionally. And in many other places the same principle is laid down, a principle which I believe the Christian Church to-day needs to have recalled to its consciousness, that it may be quickened to realise it in its experience far more than is the case at present.

Let me remind you, too, that that universality of the gifts of the Divine Spirit is implied in the very conception of what Christ's work, in its deepest and most precious aspects to us, is. For we are not to limit, as a great many so-called earnest evangelical teachers and believers do--we are not to limit His work to that which is effected when a man first becomes a Christian--viz. pardon and acceptance with God. God forbid that I should ever seem to underrate that great initial gift on which everything else must be built. But I am not underrating it when I say, Let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith, and the proportion of faith has been violated, and the perspective and completeness of Christian truth, and of Christ's gifts, have been, alas! to a very large extent distorted because Christian people, trained in what we call the evangelical school, have laid far too little emphasis on the fact that the essential gift of Christ to His people is not pardon, nor acceptance, nor justification, but life; and that forgiveness, and altered relationship to God, and assurance of acceptance with Him, are all preliminaries. They are, if I may recur to a figure that I have already employed, the preparing of the channel, and the taking away of the obstacles that block its mouth, in order to the inrush of the flood of the river of the water of life.

This life that Christ gives is the result of the gift of the Spirit. So If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His. The life is the gift considered from our side, and the Spirit is the gift considered from the divine side. Every man that hath the Son hath life; because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ has made him free from the law of sin and death. So you see if that is true--and I for my part am sure that it is--then all that vulgar way of looking at the influences of the Holy Spirit upon men, as if they were confined to certain exceptional people, or certain abnormal and extraordinary and elevated acts, is swept away. It is not the spasmodic, the exceptional, the rare, not the lofty or transcendentally Christlike acts or characters that are alone the manifestation of the Spirit.

Nor is this gift a thing that a man can discover as distinct from his own consciousness. The point where the river of the water of life comes into the channel of our spirits lies away far up, near the sources, and long before the stream comes into sight in our own consciousness, the blended waters have been inseparably mingled, and flow on peacefully together. The Spirit beareth witness with our spirits; and you are not to expect that you can hear two voices speaking, but it is one voice and one only.

Now, that universality of this divine gift underlies the very constitution of the Christian Church. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty, said Paul. It is because each Christian man has access to the one Source of illumination and of truth and righteousness and holiness, that no Christian man is to become subject to the dominion of a brother. And it is because on the servants and on the handmaidens has been poured out, in these days, God's Spirit and they prophesy, that all domination of classes or individuals, and all stiffening of the free life of God's Church by man-made creeds, are contrary to the very basis of its existence, and an attack on the dignity of each individual member of the Church. Ye have an unction from the Holy One is said to all Christian people--and ye need not that any man teach you, still less that any man, or body of men, or document framed by men, should be set up as normal and authoritative over Christ's free people.

Still further, and only one word--Let me remind you of what I have already said, and what is only too sadly true, that this grand universality of the Spirit's gift to all Christian people does not fill, in the mind of the ordinary Christian man, the place that it ought, and it does not fill it, therefore, in his experience. I say no more upon that point.

**II. And now let me say a word, secondly, about the many-sidedness of this universal gift.**

One of the reasons why Christian people as a whole do not realise the universality as they ought is, as I have already suggested in a somewhat different connection, because they limit their notions far too much of what the gift of God's Spirit is to do to men. We must take a wider view of what that Spirit is meant to effect than we ordinarily take, before we understand how real and how visible its universal manifestations are. Take a leaf out of the Old Testament. The man who made the brass-work for the Tabernacle was full of the Spirit of God. The poets who sung the Psalms, in more than one place, declare of themselves that they, too, were but the harps upon which the divine finger played. Samson was capable of his rude feats of physical strength, because the Spirit of God was upon him. Art, song, counsel, statesmanlike adaptation of means to ends, and discernment of proper courses for a nation, such as were exemplified in Joseph and in Daniel, are, in the Old Testament, ascribed to the Spirit of God, and even the rude physical strength of the simple-natured and sensuous athlete is traced up to the same source.

But again, we see another sphere of the Spirit's working in the manifestations of it in the experience of the primitive Church. These are, as we all know, accompanied with miracles, speaking with tongues and working wonders. The signs of that Spirit in those days were visible and audible. As I said, when the river first came into its bed, it came like the tide in Morecambe Bay, breast-high, with a roar and a rush. But it was quiet after that. In the context we have a whole series of manifestations of this Divine Spirit, some of them miraculous and some being natural faculties heightened, but all concerned with the Church as a society, and being for the benefit of the community.

But there is another class. If you turn to the Epistle to the Galatians, you will find a wonderful list there of what the Apostle calls the fruit of the Spirit, beginning with love, joy, peace. These are all moral and religious, bearing upon personal experience and the completeness of the individual character.

Now, let us include all these aspects in our conception of the fruit of the Spirit's working on men--the secular, if we may use that word, as exhibited in the Old Testament; the miraculous, as seen in the first days of the Church; the ecclesiastical, if we may so designate the endowments mentioned in the context, and the purely personal, moral, and religious emotions and acts. The plain fact is that everything in a Christian's life, except his sin, is the manifestation of that Divine Spirit, from whom all good thoughts, counsels, and works do proceed. He is the Spirit of adoption, and whenever in my heart there rises warm and blessed the aspiration Abba! Father! it is not my voice only, but the voice of that Divine Spirit. He is the Spirit of intercession; and whenever in my soul there move yearning desires after infinite good, child-like longings to be knit more closely to Him, that, too, is the voice of God's Spirit; and our prayers are then sweet, indeed, when He the Spirit gives by which we pray. In like manner, all the variety of Christian emotions and experiences is to be traced to the conjoint operation of that Divine Spirit as the source, and my own spirit as influenced by, and the organ of, the Spirit of God. If I may take a very rough illustration, there is a story in the Old Testament about a king, to whom were given a bow and arrow, with the command to shoot. The prophet's hand was laid on the king's weak hand, and the weak hand was strengthened by the touch of the other; and with one common pull they drew back the string and the arrow sped. The king drew the bow, but it was the prophet's hand grasping his wrist that gave him strength to do it. And that is how the Spirit of God will work with us if we will.

**III. Finally, consider the purpose of all the diverse manifestations of the one universal gift.**

To profit withal--for his own good who possesses it, and for the good of all the rest of his brethren.

Now, that involves two plain things. There have been people in the Christian Church who have said, We have all the Spirit, and therefore we do not need one another. There may be isolation, and self-sufficiency, and a host of other evils coming in, if we only grasp the thought, The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man, but they are all corrected if we go on and say, to profit withal. For every one of us has something, and no one of us has everything; so, on the one hand, we want each other, and, on the other hand, we are responsible for the use of what we have.

You get the life, not in order that you may plume yourself on its possession, nor in order that you may ostentatiously display it, still less in order that you may shut it up and do nothing with it; but you get the life in order that it may spread through you to others.

The least flower with a brimming cup may stand,

And share its dew-drop with another near.

We each have the life that God's grace may fructify through us to all. Power is duty; endowment is obligation; capacity prescribes work. The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

You can regulate the flow. You have the sluice; you can shut it or open it. I have said that the condition, and the only condition, of possessing the fulness of God's Spirit is faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the more you trust the more you have, and the less your faith the less the gift. You can get much or little, according to the greatness or the smallness, the fixity or the transiency, of your desires. If you hold the empty cup with a tremulous hand, the precious liquid will not be poured into it--for some of it will be spilt--in the same fulness as it would be if you held it steadily. It is the old story--the miraculous flow of the oil stopped when the widow had no more pots and vessels to bring. The reason why some of us have so little of that Divine Spirit is because we have not held out our vessels to be filled. You can diminish the flow by ignoring it, and that is what a host of so-called Christian people do nowadays. You can diminish it by neglecting to use the little that you have for the purpose for which it was given you. Does anybody profit by your spiritual life? Do you profit much by it yourselves? Has it ever been of the least good to anybody else in the world? The manifestation of the Spirit is given to you, if you are a Christian man or woman, more or less. And if you shut it up, and do never an atom of good with it, either to yourselves or to anybody else, of course it will slip away; and, sometime or other, to your astonishment, you will find that the vessels are empty, and that the Spirit of the Lord has departed from you. Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.