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

**JOHN-074**. **THE TEACHER SPIRIT by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."*

*John 14:25-26*

This wonderful outpouring of consolation and instruction with which our Lord sought to soothe the pain of parting is nearing its end. We have to conceive of a slight pause here, whilst He looks back upon what He has been saying and contrasts His teaching with that of the Comforter, whom He has once already, though in a different connection, promised to His followers. He speaks of His earthly residence with them as being an abiding, distinctly therein referring to what He has just said, that the Father and He will, in the future, make their abodewith His disciples. He contrasts the outward and transitory presence which was now nearing its end, with the inward and continuous presence, which its end was to inaugurate.

And, in like manner, with, at first sight, startling humility, He contrasts these things, the partial and to a large extent unintelligible utterances which He had given with His human lips, with the complete, universal teaching of that divine Spirit, who was to instruct in all thingspertaining to man's salvation. We have then, here, sketched in broad outline, the great truths concerning the ever-present, inward Teacher of God's Church who is to come, now that the earthly manifestation of Christ, whom the twelve called their Teacher, had reached a close. I think we may best gain the deep instruction which lies in the words before us, if we look at three points of view which they bring into prominence: the Teacher, His lesson, and His scholars.

**I. Now, as to the first, the promised Teacher.**

I need not repeat what I have said in former sermons as to the wide sweep of that word the Comforter, beyond just reminding you that it means literally one who is called to the side of another, primarily for the purpose of being his representative in some legal process; and, more widely, for any purpose of help, encouragement, and strength. That being so, Comforter, in its modern sense of Consoler, is far too narrow for the full force of the word, which means much rather Comforter, in its ancient and etymological sense of one who, in company with another, makes Him strong and brave.

But the point to which I desire to turn attention now is this, that this comforting and strengthening office of the divine Spirit is brought into immediate connection here with the conception of Him as a Teacher. That is to say, the best strength that God, by His Spirit, can give us is by our firm grasp and growing clearness of understanding of the truths which are wrapped up in Jesus Christ. All power for endurance, for service, is there, and when the Spirit of God teaches a man what God reveals in Christ, He therein and thereby most fully discharges His office of Strengthener.

Then note still further the other designation of this divine Teacher which is here given: The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost. We might have expected, as indeed we find in another context in this great final discourse, the Spirit of Truthas appropriate in connection with the office of teaching. But is there not a profound lesson for us here in this, that, side by side with the thought of illumination, there lies the thought of purity built upon consecration, which is the Scripture definition of holiness? That suggests that there is an indissoluble connection between the real knowledge of God's truth and practical holiness of life. That connection is of a double sort. There is no holiness without such knowledge, and there is no such knowledge without holiness.

There is no real knowledge of Christ and His truth without purity of heart. The man who has no music in his soul can never be brought to understand the deep harmonies of the great masters and magicians of sound. The man who has no eye for beauty can never be brought to bow his spirit before some of those embodiments of loveliness and sublimity which the painter's brush has cast upon the canvas. And the man who has no longings after purity, nor has attained to any degree of moral conformity with the divine image, is not in possession of the sense which is needed in order that he should understand the deep things of God.

The scholars in this school have to wash their hands before they go to school, and come there with clean hands and clean hearts. Foulness and the love of it are bars to all understanding of God's truth. And, on the other hand, the truest inducements, motives, and powers for purity are found in that great word which is all according to godliness, and is meant much rather to make us good than to make us wise.

So, in this designation of the teaching Spirit as holy, there lie lessons for two classes of people. All fanatical professions of possessing divine illumination, which are not warranted and sealed by purity of life, are lies or self-delusion. And, on the other hand, coldblooded intellectualism will never force the locks of the palace of divine truth, but they that come there must have clean hands and a pure heart; and only those who have the love and the longing for goodness will be wise scholars in Christ's school. Your theology is nothing unless its distinct outcome is morality, and you must be prepared to accept the painful, the punitive, the purifying influences of that divine Spirit on your moral natures if you want to have His enlightening influences shining on the truth as it is in Jesus. If any man wills to do His will, he, and only he, shall know of the doctrine. Knowledge and holiness are as inseparable in divine things as light and heat.

And still further note that this great Teacher is sent by Godin Christ's name. That pregnant phrase, In My name, cannot be represented by any one form of expression into which we may translate it, but covers a larger space. God in Christ's name sends the Spirit. That is to say, in some deep sense God acts as Christ's representative; just as Christ comes in the Father's name and acts as His representative. And, again, God sends in Christ's name; that is, the historical manifestation of Christ is the basis on which the sending of the Spirit is possible and rests. The revelation had to be complete before He who came to unfold the meaning of the revelation had material to work upon. The Spirit, which is sent in Christ's name, has, for the basis of His mission, and the means by which He acts, the recorded facts of Christ's life and death, these and none other.

And then note finally about this matter, the strong and unmistakable declaration here, that that divine Spirit is a person: He shall teach you all things. They tell us that the doctrine of the Trinity is not in the New Testament. The word is not, but the thing is. In this verse we have the Father, the Son, and the Spirit brought into such close and indissoluble union as is only vindicated from the charge of blasphemy by the belief in the divinity of each. Just as the Apostolic benediction, The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spiritnecessarily involves the divinity of all who are thus invoked, so we stand here in the presence of a truth which pierces into the deeps of Deity. That divine Spirit is more than an influence. He shall teach, and He can be grieved by evil and sin. I do not enlarge upon these thoughts. My purpose is mainly to bring them out clearly before you.

**II. I pass in the second place to the consideration of the Lesson which this promised Teacher gives.**

Mark the words, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Now as we have seen in the exposition of the words in My name, the whole subject-matter of the divine Spirit's teaching is the life and work and death and person of Jesus Christ. He shall teach you all thingsis wider than He shall bring all things which I have said to you to your remembrance. But whilst that is so, the clear implication of the words before us is that Christ is the lesson book, of which the divine Spirit is the Teacher. His weapon, to take another metaphor, with which He plies men's hearts and minds and wills, convincing the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment, and leading those who are convinced into deeper knowledge and larger wisdom, is the recorded facts concerning the life and manifestation of Jesus Christ. The significance of this lesson book, the history of our Lord, cannot be unfolded all at once. There is something altogether unique in the incorruption and germinant power of all His deeds and of all His words. This Carpenter of Nazareth has reached the heights which the greatest thinkers and poets of the past have never reached, or only in little snatches and fragments of their words. His words open out, generation after generation, into undreamed-of wisdom, and there are found to be hived in them stores of sweetness that were never suspected until the occasion came that drew them forth. The world and the Church received Christ, as it were, in the dark; and, as with some man receiving a precious gift as the morning was dawning, each fresh moment revealed, as the light grew, new beauties and new preciousness in the thing possessed. So Christ, in His infinite significance, fresh and new for all generations, was given at first, and ever since the Church and the world have been learning the meaning of the gift which they received. Christ's words are inexhaustible, and the Spirit's teaching is to unveil more and more of the infinite significance that lies in the apparently least significant of them.

Now, then, note that if this be our Lord's meaning here, Jesus Christ plainly anticipated that, after His departure from earth, there should be a development of Christian doctrine. We are often taunted with the fact, which is exaggerated for the purpose of controversy, that a clear and full statement of the central truths which orthodox Christianity holds, is found rather in the Apostolic epistles than in the Master's words, and the shallow axiom is often quoted with great approbation: Jesus Christ is our Master, and not Paul. I do not grant that the germs and the central truths of the Gospel are not to be found in Christ's words, but I admit that the full, articulate statement of them is to be found rather in the servant's letters, and I say that that is exactly what Jesus Christ told us to expect, that after He was gone, words that had been all obscure, and thoughts that had been only fragmentarily intelligible, would come to be seen clearly, and would be discerned for what they were. The earlier disciples had only a very partial grasp of Christ's nature. They knew next to nothing of the great doctrine of sacrifice; they knew nothing about His resurrection; they did not in the least understand that He was going back to heaven; they had but glimmering conceptions of the spirituality or universality of His Kingdom. Whilst they were listening to Him at that table they did not believe in the atonement; but they dimly believed in the divinity of Jesus Christ; they did not believe in His resurrection; they did not believe in His ascension; they did not believe that He was founding a spiritual kingdom, a kingdom was to rule over all the world till the end of time. None of these truths were in their mind. They had all been in germ in His words. And after He was gone, there came over them a breath of the teaching Spirit, and the unintelligible flashed up into significance. The history of the Church is the proof of the truth of this promise, and if anybody says to me, Where is the fulfilment of the promise of a Spirit that will bring all things to your remembrance?I say--here in this Book! These four Gospels, these Apostolic Epistles, show that the word which our Lord here speaks has been gloriously fulfilled. Christ anticipated a development of doctrine, and it casts no slur or suspicion on the truthfulness of the apostolic representation of the Christian truths, that they are only sparsely and fragmentarily to be found in the records of Christ's life,

Then there is another practical conclusion from the words before us, on which I touch for a moment, and that is, that if Jesus Christ and the deep understanding of Him be the true lesson of the divine, teaching Spirit, then real progress consists, not in getting beyond Christ, but in getting more fully into Him. We hear a great deal in these days about advanced thought and progressive Christianity. I hope I believe in the continuous advance of Christian thought as joyfully as any man, but my notion of it--and I humbly venture to say Christ's notion of it--is to get more and more into His heart, and to find within Him, and not away from Him, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. We leave all other great men behind. All other teacherswords become feeble by age, as their persons become ghostly, wrapped in thickening folds of oblivion; but the progress of the Church consists in absorbing more and more of Christ, in understanding Him better, and becoming more and more moulded by His influence. The Spirit's teaching brings out the ever fresh significance of the ancient and perpetual revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

**III. And now, lastly, note the Scholars.**

Primarily, of course, these are the Apostolic group but the Apostles, in all these discourses, stand as the representatives of the Church, and not as separated from it. And whilst the teaching Spirit could bring to the remembranceof those only who first heard them the words that He said unto them, that Spirit's teaching function is not limited to those who listened to the Lord Jesus. The fire that was kindled on Pentecost has not died down into grey ashes, nor the river that then broke forth been sucked up by thirsty sands of successive generations, but the fire is still with us, and the river still flows near our lips, and we, too, may be taught by that divine Spirit. For this very Evangelist, in writing his Epistle, has at least two distinct references to, and almost verbal quotations of, this promise, when he says, addressing all his Asiatic brethren, Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things. And again, The unction which ye have of Him abideth with you, and ye need not that any man should teach you.

So, then, Christian men and women, every believing soul has this divine Spirit for His Teacher, and the humblest of us may, if we will, learn of Him and be led by Him into profounder knowledge of that great Lord.

Oh! dear brethren, the belief in the actual presence with the Church of a Spirit that teaches all faithful members thereof, is far too much hesitatingly held by the common Christianity of this day. We ought to be the standing witnesses in the world of the reality of a supernatural influence, and how can we be, if we do not believe it ourselves, and never feel that we are under it?

But whilst a continuous inspiration from that self-same Spirit is the prerogative of all believing souls, let us not forget that the early teaching is the standard by which all such must be tried. As to the first disciples the office of the divine Spirit was to bring before them the deep significance of their Master's life and words, so to us the office of the teaching Spirit is to bring to our minds the deep significance of the record by these earliest scholars of what they learned from Him. The authority of the New Testament over our faith is based upon these words, and Paul's warning applies especially to this generation, with its thoughts about a continuous inspiration and outgrowing of the New Testament teaching: If a man think himself to be spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

Now from all this take three counsels. Let this great promise fill us with shame. Look at Christendom. Does it not contradict such words as these? Disputatious sects, Christians scarcely agreed upon any one of the great central doctrines, seem a strange fulfilment. The present condition of Christendom does not prove that Jesus Christ did not send the Spirit, but it does prove that Christ's followers have been wofully remiss and negligent in their acceptance and use of the Spirit. What slow scholars we are! How little we have learnt! How we have let passion, prejudice, human voices, the babble of men's tongues, anybody and everybody, take the office of teaching us God's truth, instead of waiting before Him and letting His Spirit teach us! It is the shame of us Christians that, with such a Teacher, we, when for the time we ought to be teachers, have need that one teach us again which be the first principles of the oracles of Christ!

Let it fill us with desire and with diligence. Let it fill us with calm hope. They tell us that Christianity is effete. Have we got all out of Jesus Christ that is in Him? Is the process that has been going on for all these centuries to stop now? No! Depend upon it that the new problems of this generation will find their solution where the old problems of past generations have found theirs, and the old commandment of the old Christ will be the new commandment of the new Christ.

Foolish men, both on the Christian and on the anti-Christian side, stand and point to the western sky and say, The Sun is setting. But there is a flush in the opposite horizon in an hour, as at midsummer; and that which sank in the west rises fresh and bright in the east for a new day. Jesus Christ is the Christ for all the ages and for every soul, and the world will only learn more and more of His inexhaustible fullness. So let us be ever quiet, patient, hopeful amidst the babble of tongues and the surges of controversy, assured that all change will but make more plain the inexhaustible significance of the infinite Christ, and that humble and obedient hearts will ever possess the promised Teacher, nor ever cry in vain, Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God. Thy Spirit is good, lead me into the land of uprightness.