

The Source of the Church's Power

From The Home Missionary, November 1, 1890

The church of Christ is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. Its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. Jesus said to the representatives of his church, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." There is no limitation to this command. The good news of a Saviour,--Christ dying as our sacrifice upon Calvary, Christ pleading as our high-priest and intercessor before God, Christ our king and deliverer, coming to redeem his children,--this is the message to be carried to all the world, to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. And the obligation rests upon all Christians. Every one, to the very utmost of his talent and opportunity, is to fulfill this commission. The love of Christ, revealed to us, makes us debtors to all who know him not. They are our brethren, and God has given us light, not for ourselves alone, but to shed upon them.

When Jesus gave the commission, he added, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." And he bade the disciples, "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." Here is the source of the church's power to fulfill her divine mission,--Christ with us, Christ abiding in our hearts by faith.

Without a living faith in Christ as a personal Saviour, it is impossible to make our influence felt in a skeptical world. If you would draw sinners out of the swift running current, your own feet must not stand on slippery places.

We cannot impart heaven's light unless we have received it. We cannot reveal a Saviour, of whom we have no knowledge. You cannot teach others of Jesus and his righteousness, you cannot portray his matchless love and the fullness of his grace, you cannot picture him as the Christian's all in all, as the comforter and guide of men, unless your own heart is filled with his love. You will not be able to present God as a God of compassion and love unless you can say, "I have tasted, and know that the Lord is good." The heavenly influences surrounding the soul of the true worker are felt by those for whom he labors; the presence of heavenly angels is not seen by human eyes, but it is felt.

"We are laborers together with God." Bear this ever in mind: Jesus says, "Without me ye can do nothing." It is God who must accomplish the work. The Saviour declared concerning what he himself had wrought, "The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." The laborers are to be partakers of the divine nature; divinity and humanity must be combined. Humanity will adapt itself to humanity, and by manly resolves and wise efforts, will set the springs of intellectual life in motion under a tide of divine forces that are powerful, thorough, and permanent.

Of the disciples after the transfiguration of Christ, it is written that at the close of this wonderful scene they "saw no man, save Jesus only." "Jesus only,"--in these words is the secret of the life and power that marked the early church. When the disciples heard the words of Christ, they felt their need of him. They sought, they found, they followed him. They were with him in the house, at the table, in the closet, in the field. They were as pupils with a teacher, daily receiving from his lips lessons of holy truth. They looked to him as servants to their master, to learn their duty. They followed him as soldiers follow their commander, fighting the good fight of faith. Though Jesus ascended to heaven, the sense of his presence was still with them. It was a personal presence, full of love and light. Jesus, the Saviour, who had walked and talked and prayed with them, who had spoken hope and comfort to their hearts, had, while the message of peace was upon his lips, been taken up from them into heaven, and the tones of his voice had come back to them as the chariot of angels received him "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." He had ascended to heaven in the form of humanity. They knew that he was before the throne of God, their friend and Saviour still; that his sympathies were unchanged; that he was still identified with suffering humanity. He was presenting before God the merits of his own precious blood, showing his wounded hands and feet as a remembrance of the price he had paid for his redeemed. They knew that he had ascended to heaven to prepare places for them, and that he would come again, and take them to himself.

As they returned from Olivet to Jerusalem, the people looked upon them, expecting to see on their faces expressions of sorrow, confusion, and defeat; but they saw there gladness and triumph. The disciples did not wail over disappointed hopes, but were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.

As they met together, they were eager to present their requests to the Father in the name of Jesus. In solemn awe they bowed in prayer, repeating to one another the assurance of the Saviour, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." During the ten days following the ascension, they with one accord devoted

the time to prayer and praise, waiting for the descent of the Holy Spirit. They extended the hand of faith higher and higher, with the mighty argument, "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

And Pentecost brought them the heavenly illumination. The spiritual truths which they could not comprehend while Christ was with them, were now unfolded. Power from on high was given them, and they became witnesses for Christ, even unto the uttermost part of the earth. {HM, November 1, 1890 par. 9}

All that Christ was to the early disciples, he desires to be to his children today. They too may say, with the assurance of the beloved John, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life; . . . that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." Communion with God through Christ and in Christ,—here is the source, the secret, of all spiritual life. It is a communion not limited to times and places, but constant, abiding. This is not the privilege alone of the minister, the Bible worker, or the missionary, but of the canvasser, the man of business, of all the followers of Christ. All may walk and talk with Jesus; their hearts may be stayed on God.

It is because there is so little communion with God, that spiritual life is so feeble, and the efforts of our workers meet with so little success. Our natures must be raised from their earthliness; they must be kindled and purified in the upper brightness of God's divine presence. Why are we so easily satisfied with little flashes of light, when there is a heaven of illumination for us? We drink at shallow streams, when there is a great fountain just above us, if we will only rise a little higher in the pathway of faith. {HM, November 1, 1890 par. 11}

It is by beholding Christ, through faith, that we are to be changed into his likeness. As we meditate upon the perfection of his character, we shall desire to become wholly transformed and renewed in the image of his purity. There will be a hungering and thirsting of soul to be made like him whom we adore. The more our thoughts are upon Christ, the more we shall speak of him to others, and represent him to the world. We shall represent him in our words, in our love for the brethren, in our deep, earnest love for the souls for whom Christ died.

We need to study the Bible more, that our minds may dwell upon the infinite sacrifice of Christ, and his mediation in our behalf. Let not Christ's words and the words of some finite being, bear with equal weight upon you. Fill the whole heart with the words of God. They are the living water, quenching your burning thirst. They are the living bread from heaven. Of this bread you must eat, and you will gain in spirituality and power, ever growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. {HM, November 1, 1890 par. 13}

We need to study the truth for ourselves. We must individually look to God for divine enlightenment; and if we do this, his Spirit will be given us to illuminate the words of the Living Oracles. When Nathanael came to Jesus, the Saviour exclaimed, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." Nathanael said, "Whence knowest thou me?" Jesus answered, "When thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee." And Jesus will see us also in the secret places of prayer, if with the whole heart we will seek him for light, that we may know what is truth.

It is impossible for any human mind to comprehend all the richness and greatness of even one promise of God. One catches the glory from one point of view, another the beauty and grace from another point, and the soul is filled with the heavenly light. If we saw all the glory, the spirit would faint; but we can bear far greater revelations from God's abundant promises than we now enjoy. It makes my heart sad to think how many lose sight of the fullness of blessing designed for us; they are so contented, feeling, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," and know not that they need everything worth having.

Dear brethren, pray as you never before prayed, for beams from the Sun of Righteousness to shine upon the word, that you may be able to understand its true meaning. Jesus pleaded that his disciples might be sanctified through the truth,—the word of God. Then how earnestly should we pray that He who "searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God," He whose office it is to bring all things to the remembrance of his people, and to guide them into all truth, may be with us in the investigation of his holy word.

He who desires the truth in his heart, who longs for the working of its power upon his life and character, will be sure to have it. And when our minds are filled with thoughts of God, the realities of the unseen world will open to our understanding, all the powers of the mind will be subject to new, fresh impressions, we shall take higher, holier views of the truth, and a transformation will be going on in us daily. Then we shall be able to present the truth to others in such a way as to make an impression upon their minds.

When you have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, you will have something fresh to tell. Like Philip, when he found the Saviour, you will go forth to invite others into his presence, saying, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write."

Our prayer and social meetings should be seasons of special help and encouragement. Each one has a work to do to make these gatherings as interesting and profitable as possible. This can best be done by having a fresh experience daily in the things of God, and by not hesitating to speak of his love in the assemblies of his people.

If you do not allow darkness and unbelief to enter your hearts, they will not be manifest in your meetings. Do not gratify the enemy by dwelling upon the dark side of your experience, but trust Jesus more fully for help to resist temptation. If we thought and talked more of Jesus, and less of ourselves, we should have much more of his presence. If we will abide in him, we shall be so filled with peace, faith, and courage, and shall have such an experience to relate when we come to meeting, that others will be refreshed by our clear, strong testimony for God.

There is need of a different kind of labor in our churches from what they have had. Those ministers who are inclined merely to preach, and not to visit and put forth personal effort, need to break up this habit by working earnestly in families. Let families invite in their neighbors, and then let the minister hold Bible readings with them, and become acquainted with them. There needs to be less preaching and more pastoral work done in our churches. Those who have no aptitude for this kind of labor, should educate themselves, and come more into harmony with Christ's manner of working. Habit is not formed by one act alone, but is the result of a succession of actions. God's workers are called upon to vary their labor; they should surprise the people and happily disappoint them by doing work that will be instructive, and that will interest the mind. There should be fewer sermons, and more educating.

Brethren, we must have less of self, and more of God. We are not to trust for success to what we can do, but to what Christ can do through our efforts. The efficiency of our labor depends upon our hold on God. The Lord requires of you diligent culture of your abilities; unless you are constantly in Christ's school, the tastes and aspirations will become earthly, and the energies entrusted to you for the accomplishment of God's work will be perverted and misplaced.

The Holy Spirit is grieved and driven away by the self-sufficiency, the unchristlike spirit, that is cherished. You have no time to spend in contention. Draw near to God, and go to work for Christ and the souls he died to save. If mistakes are made, as they will be, do not fall back, content to make no further effort, but try again. With agony of desire, in humility, with wrestling faith, come to One who is too wise to err, and who will make no mistake in your case; One who knows your every weakness, and who will hear your heart-felt prayers. May God make his servants wise through the divine illumination, that the mould of man may not be seen on any of the great and important enterprises before us!

The Lord wants us to come up into the mount,--more directly into his presence. We are coming to a crisis, which, more than any previous time since the world began, will demand the entire consecration of every faculty of the mind and every power of the being, on the part of all who have named the name of Christ.

It is through the church that the self-sacrificing love of Jesus is to be made manifest to the world; but by the present example of the church the character of Christ is misrepresented, and a false conception of him is given to the world. Self-love excludes the love of Jesus from the soul, and this is why there is not in the church greater zeal and more fervent love for Him who first loved us. Self is supreme in so many hearts. Their thoughts, their time, their money, are given to self-gratification, while souls for whom Christ died are perishing.

This is why the Lord cannot impart to his church the fullness of his blessing. To honor them in a distinguished manner before the world would be to put his seal upon their works, confirming their false representation of his character. When the church shall come out from the world, and be separate from its maxims, habits, and practices, the Lord Jesus will work with his people; he will pour a large measure of his Spirit upon them, and the world will know that the Father loves them. Will the people of God continue to be so stupefied with selfishness? His blessing hangs over them, but it cannot be bestowed in its fullness because they are so corrupted with the spirit and practices of the world. There is spiritual pride among them; and should the Lord work as his heart longs to do, it would but confirm, them in their self-esteem and self-exaltation. Shall Christ continue to be misrepresented by our people? Shall the grace of God, the divine enlightenment, be shut away from his church, because of their lukewarmness? It will be, unless there is most thorough seeking of God, renunciation of the world, and humbling of the soul before God. The converting power of God must pass through our churches.

A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. We must have the holy unction from God, the baptism of his Spirit. This is the only efficient agent in the promulgation of sacred truth. It is the Spirit of God that quickens the lifeless faculties of the soul to appreciate heavenly things, and attracts the affections toward God and the truth. What we need, what we cannot do without, is the power of the Holy Spirit to work with our efforts. All pampering of self must be at an end. There is a weakness of intellect, a lack of religious fervor, in those who want to lean upon others, to be petted, waited on, and propped up. There must be an earnest longing, a soul-hunger, for the presence of the Lord. Make him your support, your front guard and your rearward. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." He who has endowed the human mind with all its powers, will so mould these capabilities that there will be no extremes; all will act harmoniously.

It is a case of life or death with us. We have been stricken with spiritual paralysis, and every one needs the help of the Great Physician. He alone can reach our case. He is only waiting to be invited by us with earnest heart, with sincere desire. Nothing is wanting but a preparation of heart; we are to clear away the rubbish, open the door, and invite Jesus to come in and abide with us. Simple, earnest, believing prayer always brings him to our side as a mighty helper. He says to us, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." He longs to come in; he is only waiting for us to prepare the way, to open the door, and he will come in.

A revival need be expected only in answer to prayer. When churches are revived, it is because some individual seeks earnestly for the blessing of God. He hungers and thirsts after God, and asks in faith, and receives accordingly. He goes to work in earnest, feeling his great dependence upon the Lord, and souls are aroused to seek for a like blessing, and a season of refreshing falls upon the hearts of men.

Many are weary of their half-hearted service. Their souls cry out after the living God. They cannot be satisfied with a form of godliness; they long for the deep movings of the Holy Spirit. Let the weary, discouraged one cry, as did Jacob, for the Comforter. Let him lay bare his soul in the secret place before God. Let him with loathing put away soul-defilement. The work is between him and his God.

God is at work; he doeth wonders; and although he is high and lifted up, prayer will reach his throne. He that is turning and overturning, he that can do marvelous things, will regard the contrite prayer of faith from the humblest of his children.

We are not to look at ourselves. The more we dwell on our imperfections, the less strength we shall have to overcome them. Jesus says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved." It is not necessary for us to be ever stumbling and repenting, and writing bitter things against ourselves. It is our privilege to believe the promises of the word of God, and accept the blessings that Jesus loves to bestow, that our joy may be full.

Put away all doubt. Dismiss your fears. Obtain the experience that Paul had when he exclaimed, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Surrender everything to Christ, and let your life be hid with Christ in God. Then you will be a power for good.

The Lord did not lock the reservoir of heaven after pouring his Spirit upon the early disciples. We also may receive of the fullness of his blessing. Heaven is full of the treasures of his grace, and those who come to God in faith may claim all that he has promised.

I beseech you to keep reaching out after God, to keep drinking of the Fountain of living water. You may be as a tree planted by the rivers of water, whose leaf does not wither. You may be full of moisture, and be able to refresh others, and to give them grace and comfort.

In our schools, the students can do much more than they have done, or are now doing, to exert a right influence upon others. Those who love the truth will be workers together with God to sustain the authority and purity of the school. New students are coming in, and now, at their very introduction to the school, is the time for those who love God to put forth loving, earnest, intelligent effort in behalf of souls out of Christ. Before associations are formed, companions chosen, that will give no religious strength, sow the seed for time and eternity; let the better influences preoccupy the thoughts. A few zealous, wise workers for the Master could secure many souls who are liable to drift in a wrong direction.

As the palm-tree, drawing nourishment from fountains of living water, is green and flourishing in the midst of the desert, so the Christian may draw rich supplies of grace from the fountain of God's love, and may guide weary souls, that are full of unrest, and ready to perish in the desert of sin, to those waters of which they may drink and live. He is ever pointing his fellow-men to Jesus, who invites, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." This fountain never fails us; we may draw, and draw again.

Mrs. E. G. White.