

THE HOLY SPIRIT COMPARED TO THE WIND

"The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell from where it comes and where it goes. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit."

John 3:8

AT the present moment I am not able to enter fully into the subject of the new birth. I am very weary, both in body and mind and cannot attempt that great and mysterious theme. To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under Heaven and it is not the time to preach upon regeneration when the head is aching, nor to discourse upon the new nature when the mind is distracted. I selected my text with the intention of fixing upon one great illustration which strikes me just now as being so suggestive, and with Divine assistance I may be able to work it out with profit to you and ease to myself.

I shall endeavor to bring before you the parallel which our Savior here draws between the wind and the Holy Spirit. It is a remarkable fact, known, I dare say to most of you, that both in the Hebrew and Greek languages the same word is used for spirit and for wind—so that our Savior, as it were, rode upon the wings of the wind, while he was instructing the seeking Rabbi in the deep things of God. He caught at the very name of the wind as a means of fastening a spiritual truth upon the memory of the enquirer, hinting to us that language should be watched by the teacher that he may find out suitable words and employ those which will best assist the disciple to comprehend and to retain his teaching. "The wind," said He, "blows," and the very same word would have been employed if He had meant to say, "The Spirit blows where He wishes."

There was intended, doubtless, to be a very close and intimate parallel between the Spirit of God and the wind, or otherwise the great Ruler of Providence who invisibly controlled the confusion of Babel would not have fashioned human language so that the same word should stand for both. Language, as well as nature, illustrates the wisdom of God! It is only in His light that we see light—may the Holy Spirit be graciously pleased to reveal Himself in His Divine operations to all our waiting minds.

We are taught in God's Word that the Holy Spirit comes upon the sons of men and makes them new creatures. Until He enters them they are "dead in trespasses and sins." They cannot discern the things of God because Divine Truths of God are spiritual and spiritually discerned—and unrenewed men are carnal and possess not the power to search out the deep things of God. The Spirit of God creates new in the children of God and then in their new-born spirituality they discover and come to understand spiritual things, but not before. And, therefore, my beloved Hearers, unless you possess the Spirit, no metaphors, however simple, can reveal Him to you.

Let us not mention the name of the Holy Spirit without due honor. Forever blessed are You, most glorious Spirit, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and with the Son! Let all the angels of God worship You! Be You had in honor world without end!

1. We will consider IN WHAT SENSE THE HOLY SPIRIT MAY BE COMPARED TO THE WIND. The Spirit of God, to help the spiritually-minded in their study of His Character and Nature condescends to compare Himself to dew, fire, oil, water and other suggestive types. And among the rest our Savior uses the metaphor of wind. What is the first thought here but that of mystery? It was the objection on the score of mystery which our Lord was trying to remove from the mind of Nicodemus. Nicodemus in effect, said, "I

cannot understand it. How can it be? A man born again when he is old, created over again and that from an invisible agency from above? How can these things be?"

Jesus at once directed his attention to the wind, which is none the less real and operative because of its mysterious origin and operation. You cannot tell from where the wind comes—you know it blows from the north or from the that it is blowing to the east or to the west, but where is it going? From where did these particles of air originate which rush so rapidly past? Where are they going? By what law are they guided in their course and where will their journey end?

The gale may be blowing due east here, but it may be driving west a hundred miles away. In one district the wind may be rushing from the north and yet not far from it there may be a strong current from the south. Those who ascend in balloons tell us that they meet with crosscurrents—one wind blowing in this direction and another layer of air moving towards an opposite quarter—how is this? If you have watched the skies you must occasionally have noticed a stream of clouds hurrying to the right, while higher up, another company is sailing to the left! It is a question whether thunder and lightning may not be produced by the friction of two currents of air traveling in different directions. But why is it that this current takes it into its head to go this way, while another steers for quite another port? Will they meet across each other's path in regions far away?

Are there whirlpools in the air as in the water? Are there eddies, currents, rivers of air, lakes of air? Is the whole atmosphere like the sea, only composed of less dense matter? If so, what is it that stirs up that great deep of air and bids it howl in the hurricane and then constrains it to subside into the calm? The philosopher may scheme some conjecture to prove that the "trade winds" blow at certain intervals because of the sun crossing the equator at those periods and that there must necessarily be a current of air going towards the equator because of the rarefaction. But he cannot tell you why the weathercock on yonder church steeple turned this morning from south-west to due east.

He cannot tell me why it is that the sailor finds that his sails are at one time filled with wind and in a few minutes they fall loosely about so that he must steer upon another tack if he would make headway. The various motions of the air remain a mystery to all but the infinite Jehovah. My Brethren, the like mystery is observed in the work of the Spirit of God. His Person and work are not to be comprehended by the mind of man. He may be here tonight, but you cannot see Him—He speaks to one heart, but others cannot hear His voice. He is not recognizable by the unrefined senses of the unregenerate.

The spiritual man discerns Him, feels Him, hears Him and delights in Him, but neither wit nor learning can lead a man into the secret. The Believer is often bowed down with the weight of the Spirit's Glory, or lifted up upon the wings of His majesty. But even he knows not how these feelings are worked in him. The fire of holy life is at seasons gently fanned with the soft breath of Divine comfort, or the deep sea of spiritual existence stirred with the mighty blast of the Spirit's rebuke. But still it is forevermore a mystery how the eternal God comes into contact with the finite mind of His creature, man. God is filling all Heaven, meanwhile, and yet dwelling in a human body as in a temple—occupying all space and yet operating upon the will, the judgment, the mind of the poor insignificant creature called man.

We may enquire, but who can answer us? We may search, but who shall lead us into the hidden things of the Most High? He brooded over chaos and produced order, but who shall tell us after what fashion He worked? He overshadowed the Virgin and prepared a body for the Son of God, but into this secret who shall dare pry? His is the anointing, sealing, comforting and sanctifying of the saints—but how does He work all these things? He makes intercession for us according to the will of God. He dwells in us and leads us into all the Truths of God—but who among us can explain to his fellow man the order of the Divine working?

Though veiled from human eye like the Glory which shone between the cherubim, we believe in the Holy Spirit and therefore see Him. But if our faith needed to sustain it, we should never believe at all. Mystery is far from being all which the Savior would teach by this simile. Surely He meant to show us that the operations of the Spirit are like the wind for Divinity. Who can create a

wind? The most ambitious of human princes would scarcely attempt to turn, much less to send forth, the wind! These steeds of the storm know no bit nor bridle, neither will they come at any man's bidding. Let our senators do what they will, they will scarcely have the madness to legislate the winds!

Old Boreas, as the heathens called him, is not to be bound with chains and welded on an earthly anvil, or in a vulcanian forge. "The wind blows where it wishes." And it does so because God directs it and suffers it not to stay for man nor to tarry for the sons of men. So with the Spirit of God. All the true operations of the Spirit are due in no sense whatever to man, but always to God and to His Sovereign will. Revivalists may get up excitement with the best intentions and may warm peoples' hearts till they begin to cry out, but all this ends in nothing unless it is Divine work. Have I not said scores of times from this pulpit, "All that is of Nature's spinning must be unraveled"?

Every particle which Nature puts upon the foundation will turn out to be but "wood, hay and stubble," and will be consumed. It is only "the gold, the silver and the precious stones" of God's building that will stand the fiery test. "You must be born again from above," for human regenerations are lies. You may blow with your mouth and produce some trifling effects upon trifles as light as air. Man in his zeal may set the windmills of silly minds in motion. But, truly, to stir men's hearts with substantial and eternal Truths of God needs a celestial breeze such as the Lord alone can send!

Did not our Lord also intend to hint at the Sovereignty of the Spirit's work? For what other reason did He say, "The wind blows where it wishes?" There is an arbitrariness about the wind. It does just as it pleases and the laws which regulate its changes are unknown to man. "Free as the wind," we say—"the wild winds." So is the mighty working of God! It is a very solemn thought and one which should tend to make us humble before the Lord—that we are, as to the matter of salvation—entirely in His hands! If I have a moth in my hand tonight I can bruise its wings, or I can crush it at my will and by no attempts of its own can it escape from me. And every sinner is absolutely in the hands of God and—let him remember he is in the hand of an angry God, too.

The only comfort is that he is in the hand of a God who, for Jesus' sake, delights to have mercy upon even the vilest of the vile. Sinner, God can give you the Holy Spirit if He wills. But if He should say concerning you, "Let him alone," your fate is sealed, your damnation is sure! It is a thought which some would say is "enough to freeze all energy." Beloved, I would to God it would freeze the energy of the flesh and make the flesh dead in the sense of powerlessness—for God never truly begins to show His might till we have seen an end of all human power. I tell you, Sinner, you are as dead concerning spiritual things as the corpse that is laid in its coffin! No, as the corpse that is rotting in its grave and has become, like Lazarus in the tomb, stinking and offensive.

There is a voice that can call you forth out of your sepulcher, but if that voice comes not remember where you are—justly damned, justly ruined, justly cut off forever from all hope. What do you say? Do you tremble at this? Do you cry, "O God! Have pity upon me"? He will hear your cry, Sinner, for there never yet was a sincere cry that went up to Heaven, though it were ever so feeble, but what it had an answer of peace. When one of the old saints lay dying, he could only say, "O Lord, I trust You languida fide," with a languid faith. It is poor work that, but, oh, it is safe work. You can only trust Christ with a feeble faith. If it is such a poor trembling faith that it does not grip Him, but only touches the hem of His garment, it nevertheless saves you!

If you can look at Him, though it is only a great way off, yet it saves you. And oh, what a comfort this is, that you are still on pleading terms with Him and in a place of hope! "Whoever believes is not condemned." But, oh, do not trifle with the day of Divine Grace, lest having frequently heard the warning, and hardened your neck just as often, you should "suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy!" If He shuts you out, none can bid you come in! If He does but close the iron bar, you are shut out in the darkness of obstinacy, obduracy and despair forever—the victim of your own delusions!

Sinner, if God saves you, He shall have all the glory—for He has a right to do as He wills—for He says, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” But still, I think I have not yet brought out what is in the text. Do you not think that the text was intended to show the varied methods in which the Spirit of God works in the conversion and regeneration of men? “The wind blows where it wishes.” Now observe the different force of the wind. This afternoon the wind seemed as if it would tear up every tree and doubtless, had they been in leaf, many of those noble princes of the forest must have stretched themselves prone upon the earth. But God takes care that in these times of boisterous gales there should be no leaf and therefore the wind gets but little purchase with which to drag up a tree.

But the wind does not always blow as it did this afternoon. On a summer’s evening there is such a gentle zephyr that even the gnats who have been arranging a dance among themselves are not disturbed, but keep to their proper places. Yes, the aspen seems as if it could be quiet, though you know it keeps forever quivering, according to the old legend that it was the tree on which the Savior hung and therefore trembles still as though through fear of the sin which came upon it. It is but a legend. There are times when all is still and calm, when everything is quiet and you can scarcely detect the wind at all.

Now just so it is with the Spirit of God. To some of us He came like a “rushing mighty wind.” Oh, what tearing of soul there were then! My spirit was like a sea tossed up into tremendous waves, made, as Job says, “To boil like a pot,” till one would think the deep were hoary. Oh, how that wind came crashing through my soul and every hope I had was bowed as the trees of the wood in the tempest! Read the story of John Bunyan’s conversion—it was just the same. Turn to Martin Luther—you find his conversion of the same sort. So might I mention hundreds of biographies in which the Spirit of God came like a tornado sweeping everything before it and the men could not but feel that God was in the whirlwind.

To others He comes so gently they cannot tell when first the Spirit of God came. They recollect that night when mother prayed so with brothers and sisters and when they could not sleep for hours because the big tears stood in their eyes on account of sin. They recollect the Sunday school and the teacher there. They remember that earnest minister. They cannot say exactly when they gave their hearts to God and they cannot tell about any violent convictions. They are often comforted by that text, “One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see.” But they cannot get any farther—they sometimes wish they could.

Well, they need not wish it, for the Spirit of God, as a Sovereign, will always choose His own way of operation. And if it is but the wind of the Holy Spirit, remember it is as saving in its gentleness as in its terror and is as efficient to make us new creatures when it comes with the zephyr’s breath as when it comes with the hurricane’s force. Do not quarrel with God’s way of saving you! If you are brought to the Cross be thankful for it—Christ will not mind how you got there. If you can say, “He is all my salvation and all my desire,” you never came to that without the Spirit of God bringing you to it. Do not, therefore, think you came the wrong way, for that is impossible!

Again, the wind not only differs in force, but it differs in direction. We have been saying several times the wind is always shifting. Perhaps there never were two winds that did blow exactly in the same direction. I mean that if we had power to detect the minute points of the compass, there would be found some deviation in every current, although, of course, for all practical purposes it blows from certain distinct points which the mariner marks out. Now, the Spirit of God comes from different directions.

You know very well, dear Friends, that sometimes the Spirit of God will blow with mighty force from one denomination of Christians. Then suddenly they seem to be left and God will raise up another body of Christians, fill them with Himself and qualify them for usefulness. In the days of Wesley and Whitefield there was very little of the Divine Spirit anywhere except among the Methodists. I am sure they have not a monopoly of Him now. The Divine Spirit blows also from other quarters. Sometimes He uses one man, sometimes another. We hear of a revival in the North of Ireland. By-and-by it is in the South of Scotland. It comes just as God wills, for direction.

And you know, too, dear Friends, it comes through different instrumentalities in the same Church. Sometimes the wind blows from this pulpit—God blesses me to your conversion. Another time it is from my good sister, Mrs. Bartlett's class. On a third occasion it is the Sunday school. Again, it may be another class, or the preaching of the young men, or from the individual exertion of private Believers. God causes that wind to blow just which way He wills. He works, also, through different texts of Scripture. You were converted and blessed under one text—it was quite another that was made useful to me.

Some of you were brought to Christ by terrors, others of you by love, by sweet wooing words. The wind blows as God directs. Now, dear Friends, whenever you take up a religious biography, do not sit down and say, "Now I will see whether I am just like this person." Nonsense! God never repeats Himself. Men make steel pens—thousands of grosses of them—all alike, but I will be bound to say that in quills from the common, there are no two of them precisely the same. If you look, you will soon discover that they differ in a variety of ways. Certain gardeners cut their trees into the shape of cheeses and a number of unnatural forms, but God's trees do not grow that way, they grow just anyway—gnarl their roots and twist their branches.

Great painters do not continually paint the same picture again and again and again, and my Divine Master never puts His pencil on the canvas to produce the same picture twice. Every Christian is a distinct work of Divine Grace on God's part which has in it some originality, some portion distinct from all others. I do not believe in trying to make all history uniform. It is said that Richard III had a humpback. Whether he really was deformed, or whether history gave him the humpback, I cannot tell. But it is said that all his courtiers thought it was the most beautiful humpback that ever was seen and they all began to grow humpbacks, too!

And I have known ministers who had some peculiar idiosyncrasy of experience which was nothing better than a spiritual humpback—but their people all began to have humpbacks, too—to think and talk all in the same way and to have the same doubts and fears. Now that will not do! It is not the way in which the Most High acts with regard to the wind and if He chooses to take all the points of the compass and make use of them all, let us bless and glorify His name! Are not the different winds various in their qualities? Few of us like an east wind. Most of us are very glad when the wind blows from the south. Vegetation seems to love much the south-west.

A stiff northeaster is enough to make us perish. And long continuance of the north may well freeze the whole earth! While from the west the wind seems to come laden with health from the deep blue sea. And though sometimes too strong for the sick, yet it is never a bad time when the west wind blows. The ancients all had their different opinions about wind. Some were dry, some were rainy. Some affected this disease, some touched this part of men, some the other. Certain it is that God's Holy Spirit has different qualities. In the Canticles He blows softly with the sweet breath of love. Look farther and you get that same Spirit blowing fiercely with threats and denunciation.

Sometimes you find Him convicting the world "of sin, of righteousness, of judgment." That is the north wind. At other times opening up Christ to the sinner and giving him joy and comfort. That is the south wind that blows softly and gives a balminess in which poor troubled hearts rejoice. And yet "all these works the same Spirit." Indeed, my subject is all but endless, and therefore I must stop. But even in the matter of duration you know how the wind will sometimes blow six weeks in this direction and, again, continue in another direction. And the Spirit of God does not always work with us—He does as He pleases—He comes and He goes. We may be in a happy hallowed frame at one time, and at another we may have to cry, "Come from the four winds, O Breath!"

II. We will consider, in the second place, THE PARALLEL BETWEEN THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE EFFECTS OF THE WIND. "You hear the sound of it." Ah, that we do! The wind sometimes wails as if you could hear the cry of mariners far out at sea, or the moans of the widows that must weep for them. And, oh, the Spirit of God sets men wailing with an exceedingly bitter cry for sin, as one that is in sorrow for his first-born.

“You hear the sound of it.” Oh, it is a blessed sound, that wailing! Angels rejoice over “one sinner that repents.” Then comes the wind at another time with a triumphant sound, and if there is an Aeolian harp in the window, how it swells, sweeps, descends—then rises again! It gives all the tones of music and makes the air glad with its jubilant notes. So with the Holy Spirit—sometimes He gives us faith, makes us bold—other times full of assurance, confidence, joy and peace in believing. “You hear the sound” of a full diapason of the Holy Spirit’s mighty melody within the soul of man filling him with peace and joy and rest and love.

Sometimes the wind comes, too, with another sound as though it were contending. You heard it, perhaps, this afternoon. We who are a little in the country hear it more than you do—it is as though giants were struggling in the sky together. It seems as if two seas of air, both lashed to fury, met and dashed against some unseen cliffs with terrible uproar. The Spirit of God comes into the soul sometimes and makes great contention with the flesh. Oh, what a stern striving there is against unbelief, against lust, against pride, against every evil thing.

“You hear the sound of it.” You that know what Divine experience means—you know when to go forth to fight your sins. When you can hear “the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees,” then you bestir yourself to destroy your sins. Sometimes the wind comes with a sweep as though it were going on forever. It comes past and dashes through the trees, sweeping away the rotten branches. Then away it goes across the Alps, dashing down an avalanche in its course, still onward. And as it flies, it blows away everything that is frail and weak. And on, on, on it speeds its way to some unknown goal.

And thus it is sometimes the Spirit of God will come right through us, as if He were bearing us away to that spiritual heritage which is our sure future destiny—bearing away coldness, barrenness, everything before it. We do not lament then that we do not pray. We do not believe that we cannot pray—“I can do everything,” is our joyful shout as we are carried on the wings of the wind. “You hear the sound of it.” I hope you have heard it sometimes in all its powerful, overwhelming, mighty influence till your soul has been blown away.

“You hear the sound of it.” But then the wind does something more than make a sound. And so does the Holy Spirit. It WORKS and produces manifest results. Just think what the wind is doing tonight. I cannot tell at what pitch it may be now. It is just possible that in some part of the ocean a vessel scuds along almost under bare poles. The mariners do their best to reef the sails—away she goes—now the mast is gone—they do their best to bear up but they find that in the teeth of the gale they cannot stand.

The ship dashes on the rocks and she is wrecked. And, oh, the Spirit of God is a great wrecker of false hopes and carnal confidences! I have seen the Spirit of God come to a sinner like a storm to a ship at sea. He had to take down the top gallants of the sinner’s pride. Then every thread of carnal confidence had to be reefed and then his hope, itself, had to be cut away. And on, on the vessel went, until she struck a rock and down she went. The man from that time never dared trust in his merits for he had seen his merits wrecked and broken in pieces by the wind.

The wind, too, remember, is a great leveler. It always aims at everything that is high. If you are down low in the street you escape its fury. But climb to the top of the Monument, or St. Paul’s and see whether you do not feel it! Get into the valley, it is all right. The lower branches of the trees are scarcely moved, but the top branches are rocked to and fro by it. It is a great leveler! So is the Holy Spirit. He never sees a man high but He brings him down. He makes every high thought bow before the majesty of His might.

And if you have any high thoughts tonight, rest assured that when the Spirit of God comes He will lay them low, even with the ground. Now do not let this make you fear the Holy Spirit. It is a blessed thing to be rocked so as to have our hopes tested and it is a precious thing to have our carnal confidences shaken. And how blessedly the wind purifies the atmosphere! In the Swiss valleys there is a heaviness in the air which makes the inhabitants unhealthy. They take quinine and you see them going about with big swellings in their necks.

From Martigny to Bretagne, there is a great valley in which you will see hundreds of persons diseased. The reason is that the air does not circulate. They are breathing the same air, or some of it, that their fathers breathed before them. There seems to be no ventilation between the two parts of the giant Alps and the air never circulates. But if they have a great storm which sweeps through the valleys it is a great blessing to the people. And so the Spirit of God comes and cleanses out our evil thoughts and vain imaginations—and though we do not like the hurricane, yet it brings spiritual health to our soul.

Again the wind is a great trier of the nature of things. Here comes a great rushing up the street. It sweeps over the heaps of rubbish lying in the road. Away goes all the light chaff, paper and other things which have no weight in them! They cannot stand the brunt of its whirling power. But see, the pieces of iron, the stones and all weighty things are left unmoved. In the country you will often see the farmer severing the chaff from the wheat by throwing it up into a current of air and the light husks all blow away, while the heavy wheat sinks on the heap, cleansed and purified. So is the Holy Spirit the great testing power and the result of His operations will be to show men what they are.

Here is a hypocrite, he has passed muster up to now and reckons himself to be a true and genuine man. But there comes a blast from Heaven's mighty Spirit and he finds himself to be lighter than vanity—he has no weight in him, he is driven on and has no rest. He can find no peace. He hurries from one refuge of lies to another. "There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked." Thus also we try the doctrines of men, we bring the breath of Inspiration to bear upon them—do they abide the test? Or are they driven away? Can you hold that truth in the presence of God? Can you cling to it and find it stable in the hour of trial?

Is it a nice pleasant speculation for a sunny day when all is calm and bright, or will it bear the rough rude blast of adversity when God's Holy Spirit is purifying you with His healthful influence? True Christians and sound doctrines have ballast and weight in them—they are not moved nor driven away. But empty professors and hollow dogmas are scattered like chaff before the wind when the Lord shall blow upon them with the breath of His Spirit. Therefore examine yourselves—try the doctrines and see if they are of God. "What is the chaff to the wheat?" says the Lord.

Have root in yourselves—then you will not wither in the hot blast, nor be driven away in the tempestuous day. Is not the Spirit moreover like unto the wind in its developing of character? See the dust is lying all over the picture, you cannot see the fair features of the beauteous sketch beneath. Blow off the dust and the fine colors will be seen and once more the skill of the painter will be admired. Have you ever noticed some piece of fine mosaic, or perhaps some well-cut engraving on metal all hidden and the fine lines filled up with dust?

You have blown off the accumulation and then you could admire the work. So does the Spirit of God. Men get all covered with dust in the hot dusty roadside of life till they are nearly the color of the earth itself. But they come to the hilltop of Calvary and here they stand till the wind of Heaven has cleansed them from all the dust that has gathered around their garments. Oh there is nothing like communion with the Spirit of God to counteract the earthly tendencies of a business life! There are some men that get covered with a yellow dust till they are almost hidden by it. They can talk of nothing else but money. Gold, gold, gold is getting to occupy nearly every thought.

Now I have no quarrel with money in its right place, but I do not like to see men live in it. I always try to drive away that mean and groveling spirit which lives for nothing else but to accumulate money, but I cannot always succeed. Now the Spirit of God will make a man see his folly and put his money into its right position and place the Graces of the Christian character where men can see them and glorify God in them. Never let your business character or professional skill dim and hide your Christianity. If you do, God's Spirit will come to brighten you up and He will have no mercy on these, but will, in love to your soul, cleanse and give luster to God's work which is worked in you.

I have also noticed how helpful the wind is to all who choose to avail themselves of it. In Lincolnshire, where the country is flat and below the level of the sea, they are obliged to drain the land by means of windmills and hundreds of them may be seen pumping up the water so as to relieve the land of the excess moisture. In many parts of the country nearly all the wheat and corn is ground by means of the wind. If it were not for the wind the inhabitants would be put to great inconvenience.

The Spirit of God is thus also a mighty helper to all who will avail themselves of His influences. You are inundated with sin, a flood of iniquity comes in—you can never bale out the torrent. But with the help of God's Spirit it can be done! He will so assist that you shall see the flood gradually descending and your heart once more purified. You need always to ask His help—fresh sin, like falling showers, will be poured into you by every passing day and you will need a continuous power to cast it out—you may have it in God's Spirit! He will, with ceaseless energy, help you to combat sin and make you more than a conqueror!

Or, on the other hand, if you need some power to break up and prepare your spiritual food for you, you will find no better help than what God's Spirit can give. In Eastern countries they grind corn by hand, two sitting at a small stone mill. But it is a poor affair at best—so are our own vain attempts to prepare the bread of Heaven for ourselves. We shall only get a little and that little badly ground. Commentators are good in their way, but give me the teaching of the Holy Spirit. He makes the passage clear and gives me to eat of the finest wheat. How often we have found our utter inability to understand some part of Divine Truth—we asked some of God's people and they helped us a little—but after all, we were not satisfied till we took it to the Throne of heavenly Grace and implored the teachings of the blessed Spirit!

Then how sweetly it was opened to us! We could eat of it spiritually. It was no longer husk and shell, hard to be understood. It was as bread to us and we could eat to the full. Brethren, we must make more use of the wisdom which comes from above, for the Spirit, like the wind, is open to us all to employ for our own personal benefit. I see also here a thought as to the co-operation of man and the Spirit in all Christian work. It has pleased God to make us co-workers with Him—fellow laborers—both in the matter of our own salvation and also in the effort to benefit others. Look for a moment at yon stately boat—she moves not because of her sails but she would not reach the desired haven without them.

It is the wind which propels her forward—but the wind would not act upon her as it does unless she had the rigging all fixed—her masts standing and her sails all bent so as to catch the passing breeze. But now that human seamanship has done its best, see how she flies! She will soon reach her haven with such a favoring gale as that. You have only to stand still and see how the wind bears her on like a thing of life. And so it is with the human heart. When the Spirit comes to the soul that is ready to receive such influences, then He helps you on to Christian Grace and Christian work and makes you bear up through all opposition till you come to the port of peace and can anchor safely there. Without Him we can do nothing—without us He will not work.

We are to preach the Gospel to every creature and while one plants and another waters, God adds the increase. We are to work out our own salvation—He works in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure. We must go up to possess the goodly land with our own spear and sword—but the hornet goes before us to drive out the foe. Jericho shall be captured by a Divine and miraculous interference, but even there rams' horns shall find a work to do and must be employed. The host of Midian shall be slain, but our cry is, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." We give God all the glory, nevertheless we use the means.

The water of Jordan must be sought out and used by all who desire a cleansing like Naaman the Syrian. A lump of figs must be used if other Hezekiahs are to be healed—but the Spirit is, after all, the great Cleanser and Healer of His people Israel. The lesson is clear to all—the wind turns mills that men make. It fills sails that human hands have spread. And the Spirit blesses human effort, crowns with success our labors, establishes the work of our hands upon us and teaches all through that, "the hand of the diligent makes rich." And, "if a man will not work, neither shall he eat."

Another thought suggests itself to my mind in connection with the wind and human effort. It is this—How completely dependent men are upon the wind as to what it shall do for them. They are entirely at its mercy as to its time of blowing, its strength and the direction it will take. I have already dwelt upon this thought of the sovereignty of the wind, but it comes up here in a more practical form. The steamer now can steer almost anywhere they please and at all times it will proceed on its voyage.

But the sailing ship must tack according to the wind and when becalmed must wait for the breeze to spring up. The watermill and steam mill can be worked night and day, but the mill that depends upon the wind must abide by the wind's times of blowing and must turn round its sails so as to suit the direction of the current of air. In like manner we are compelled to wait on the pleasure of the Spirit. There is no reservoir of water which we can turn on when we will and work as we please. We would forget God far more than we do now if that were the case. The sailor who is depending on the wind anxiously looks up to the masthead to see how the breeze is shifting and turning round the vane. And he scans the heavens to see what weather he is likely to have.

He would not need to care nearly so much as he does now that he is absolutely dependent on the wind, if he had steam power so as to sail in the very teeth of the storm if he so willed. God, then, keeps us looking up to Heaven by making us to be completely at His mercy as to the times and ways of giving us His helping power. It is a blessed thing to wait on God, watching for His hand and in quiet contentment leaving all to Him. Brethren, let us do our part faithfully, spread every sail, make all as perfect as human skill and wisdom can direct and then in patient continuance in well-doing, wait the Spirit's propitious gales, neither murmuring because He tarries, nor be taken unawares when He comes upon us in His Sovereign pleasure to do that which seems good in His sight.

Now tonight I have only given you some hints on this subject—you can work it out for yourselves. As you hear the wind you may get more sermons out of it than I can give you just now. The thing is perfectly inexhaustible. And I think the business of the minister is not to say all that can be said about the subject. Somebody remarked concerning a certain minister that he was a most unfair preacher because he always exhausted the subject and left nothing for anybody else to say.

That will never be said of me and I would rather that it should not. A minister should suggest germs of thought, open up new ways and present, if possible, the Truth of God in such a method as to lead men to understand that the half is not told them. And now, my dear Hearer, whether you listen often to my voice or have now stepped in for the first time I would like to ring this in your ear. Do you know the Spirit of God? If you have not the Spirit, you are none of His. "You must be born again." "What, Lord, 'MUST?' Do You not mean 'may?'" No, you must. "Does it not mean, 'You can be?'" No, you must. When a man says, "must," it all depends upon who he is. When God says, "must," there it stands and it cannot be questioned.

There are the flames of Hell—would you escape from them? You must be born again. There are Heaven's glories sparkling in their own light—would you enjoy them? You must be born again! There is the peace and joy of a Believer, would you have it? You must be born again. What, not a crumb from off the table without this? No, not one. Not a drop of water to cool your burning tongues except you are born again. This is the one condition that never changes. God never alters it and never will.

You must, must, MUST. Which shall it be? Shall your will stand, or God's will? O, let God's "must" ride right over you and bow yourselves down and say, "Lord, I must! Then I will! Ah, and it has come to this—I must tonight. Give me Christ, or else I die. I have hold of the knocker of the door of Your mercy and I must, I WILL get that door open. I will never let You go except You bless me! You say, must, Lord, and I say, must, too." "You must, you must be born again." God fulfill the "must" in each of your cases, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.