

J. C. Ryle Tracts

Some of these rare, short "Helmingham Series" tracts, not published since the 19th Century, have come into my possession, and I offer you these three exactly word for word as they were first published about the middle of the last century, while J. C. Ryle was a Rector at Helmingham, Suffolk.

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

READER,

There is hope in the Gospel for any man, so long as he lives. There is infinite willingness in Christ to *pardon sin*. There is infinite power in the Holy Spirit *to change hearts*.

There are many diseases of the body which are incurable. The cleverest doctors cannot heal them. But, thank God! there are no incurable diseases of soul. All manner and quantity of sins can be washed away by Christ. The hardest and most wicked of hearts can be *changed*.

Reader, I say again, while there is life there is hope. The oldest, the vilest, the worst of sinners may be saved. Only let him come to Christ, confess his sin, and cry to Him for pardon,—only let him cast his soul on Christ, and he shall be cured. The Holy Spirit shall be sent down on his heart, according to Christ's promise, and he shall be changed by His Almighty power into a new creature.

I never despair of any one becoming a decided Christian, whatever he may have been in days gone by. I know how great the change is from death to life; I know the mountains of division that seem to stand between some men and heaven; I know the hardness, the prejudices, the desperate sinfulness of the natural heart; but I remember that God the Father made the glorious world out of nothing. I remember the voice of the Lord Jesus could reach Lazarus when four days dead, and recall him even from the grave; I remember the amazing victories the Spirit of God has won in every nation under heaven; I remember all this, and feel that I never need despair. Yes! those very persons who now seem most utterly dead in sins, may yet be raised to a new being, and walk before God in newness of life.

Why should it not be so? the Holy Spirit is a mighty, merciful, and loving Spirit. He turns away from no man because of his vileness. He passes by no one because his sins are black and scarlet.

There was nothing in the Corinthians that He should come down and quicken them. Paul reports of them that they were "fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners." "Such," he says, "were some of you." Yet even them the Spirit made alive. "Ye are washed," he writes, "ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. vi. 9-11).

There was nothing in the Colossians that He should visit their hearts. Paul tells us that they walked in "fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Yet them also the Spirit

quicken. He made them "put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him" (Col. iii. 5-10).

There was nothing in Mary Magdalene that the Spirit should make her soul alive. Once she had been possessed with seven devils; time was, if report be true, she had been a woman proverbial for vileness and iniquity: yet even her the Spirit made a new creature,—separated her from her sins, —brought her to Christ,—made her last at the cross, and first at the tomb.

Never, never will the Spirit turn away from a soul because of its corruption. He never has done so;—He never will. It is His glory that He has purified the minds of the most impure, and made them temples for His own abode. He may yet take the worst of those who read this tract and make him a vessel of grace.

Why indeed should it not be so? The Spirit is an Almighty Spirit. He can change the stony heart into a heart of flesh; He can break the strongest bad habits like tow before the fire; He can make the most difficult things seem easy, and the mightiest objections melt away like snow in spring; He can cut the bars of brass, and throw the gates of prejudice wide open; He can fill up every valley, and make every rough place smooth. He has done it often, and He can do it again,

The Spirit can take a Jew,—the bitterest enemy of Christianity, the fiercest persecutor of true believers, the strongest stickler for Pharisaical notions, the most prejudiced opposer of Gospel doctrine,—and turn that man into an earnest preacher of the very faith he once destroyed. He has done it already.—He did it with the Apostle Paul.

The Spirit can take a Roman Catholic monk, brought up in the midst of Romish superstition,—trained from his infancy to believe false doctrine, and obey the Pope, —steeped to the eyes in error,—and make that man the clearest upholders of justification by faith the world ever saw; He has done so already.—He did it with Martin Luther.

The Spirit can take an English tinker, without learning, patronage, or money,—a man at one time notorious for nothing so much as blasphemy and swearing,—and make that man write a religious book, which shall stand unrivalled and unequalled in its way by any since the time of the Apostles. He has done so already—He did it with John Bunyan, the author of "Pilgrim's Progress."

The Spirit can take a sailor, drenched in worldliness and sin,—a profligate captain of a slave ship,—and make that man a most successful minister of the Gospel; a writer of letters which are a store-house of experimental religion; and of hymns which are known and sung wherever English is spoken. He has done it already. —He did it with John Newton.

All this the Spirit has done, and much more, of which I cannot speak particularly. And the arm of the Spirit is not shortened: His power is not decayed. He is like the Lord Jesus,—the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is still doing wonders, and will do to the very end.

I shall not be surprised to hear, even in this life, that the hardest man I know has become softened, and the proudest has taken his place at the feet of Jesus as a weaned child.

I shall not be surprised to meet many on the right hand in the day of judgment, whom I shall leave, when I die, travelling in the broad way.

I never despair, because I believe the power of the Holy Ghost. We ministers might well despair, when we look at our own performances. We are often sick of ourselves. We might well despair when we look at some who belong to our congregations; they seem as hard and insensible as the nether mill-stone: but we remember the Holy Ghost, and what He has done. We remember the Holy Ghost, and consider that He has not changed. He can come down like fire and melt the hardest hearts; He can convert the worst man or woman among our hearers, and mould their whole character into a new shape. And so we preach on. We hope because of the Holy Ghost. Oh, that our hearts would understand that the progress of true religion depends not on might or on power, but on the Lord's Spirit! Oh, that many of them would learn to lean less on ministers, and to pray more for the Holy Spirit! Oh, that all would learn to expect less from schools, and tracts, and ecclesiastical machinery; and, while using all means diligently, would seek more earnestly for the outpouring of the Spirit.

Reader, do you feel the slightest drawing towards God?—the smallest concern about your immortal soul? Does your conscience tell you this day that you have not yet felt the Spirit's power, and do you want to know what to do? Listen, and I will tell you.

For one thing, you must go at once to the Lord Jesus Christ in prayer, and beseech Him to have mercy on you, and send you the Spirit. You must go direct to that open fountain of living waters, the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall receive the Holy Ghost (John vii. 39). Begin at once to pray for the Holy Spirit. Think not you are shut up and cut off from hope: the Holy Ghost is promised to them that ask Him. His very name is the Spirit of Promise, and the Spirit of Life. Give Him no rest till He comes down and makes you a new heart. Cry mightily unto the Lord,—say unto Him, "Bless me, even me also: quicken me, and make me alive."

I dare not, for my part, send anxious souls to any one but Christ. I cannot hold with those who tell men to pray for the Holy Spirit in the first place, in order that they may go to Christ in the second place. I see no warrant of Scripture for saying so. I only see that if men feel they are needy, perishing sinners, they ought to apply, first and foremost, straight and direct to Jesus Christ. I see that He himself says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink" (John vii. 37). I know that it is written, "He hath received gifts for men, yea for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them" (Ps. lxxviii. 18). I know it is His special office to baptize with the Holy Ghost, and that "in Him all fulness dwells." I dare not pretend to be more systematic than the Bible. I believe that Christ is the meeting-place between God and the soul: and my first advice to any one who wants the Spirit, must always be, "*go to Jesus, and tell your wants to Him.*"

For another thing, if you have not yet felt the converting power of the Spirit, you must be diligent in attending those means of grace through which the Spirit works. You must regularly hear that Word which is His sword; you must habitually attend those assemblies where His presence is promised; you must, in short, be found *in the way of the Spirit*, if you want the Spirit to do you good. Blind Bartimeus would

never have received sight had he sat lazily at home, and not come forth to sit by the way- side. Zaccheus might never have seen Jesus, and become a son of Abraham, if he had not ran before and climbed up into the sycamore tree. The Spirit is a loving and good Spirit. *But he who despises means of grace, resists the Holy Ghost.*

Reader, remember these two things. I firmly believe that no man ever acted honestly and perseveringly on these two pieces of advice, who did not, sooner or later, have the Spirit, and find by experience that He is "mighty to save."
