

Sabbath School Lesson #9 – Peter and the Gentiles – 22-28 Aug 2015

Christ gives us His Spirit to fit us to be true witnesses for Him. “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:38-39). It is only until we “receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” that like Peter we can be true witnesses even to the Gentiles. Any witness short of the Holy Spirit, that is, witness without the Spirit of Christ, sent by God into your hearts (Galatians 4:6), is useless.

In this comment, the focus is on our need of receiving the Spirit of Christ before we are sent out as His witnesses, a prerequisite seldom preached. We cannot truly witness for Christ without belonging to Christ, for “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Romans 8:9). It is very important that while we urge people to be witnesses like Peter even to the Gentiles, we preach the whole truth that people must first be fitted by the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them to be true witnesses. We cannot truly witness for Christ without Him.

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He breathed a measure of His Spirit into His disciples: “He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive the Holy Ghost” (John 20:22). This act of breathing His very Spirit into His disciples Christ continues to do. We are told: “Those who rose up with Jesus would send up their faith to Him in the holiest, and pray, ‘My Father, give us Thy Spirit.’ Then Jesus would breathe upon them the Holy Ghost. In that breath was light, power, and much love, joy, and peace” {EW 55.1}. In His last words before His ascension, He said, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me ...” (Acts 1:8). It is a great mistake to urge people to go out and witness for Christ without them first receiving the Holy Spirit. Such is an emphasis on our works for salvation and not salvation by faith. Right order of things is very important! Note that Jesus Himself placed the order of things in this manner: (1) The reception of power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, that is, when it is truly said of you that “God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts” (Galatians 4:6), *and only then* (2) would you be able to be true witnesses to the ends of the earth. Here it is plain that we are not to go out and do witnessing or launch any endeavour for missions asking God to bless until *after* we have received the power of the Holy Spirit. We cannot truly witness until fitted. The Holy Spirit is God’s fitting the individual for witnessing and for translation at the Second Coming.

While the Lesson looks at Cornelius, the Council of Jerusalem, Peter and his vision, and Pentecost and Gentiles, this comment seek to emphasise the only requirement for the power to witness and that is the reception of the Spirit of Christ – the personal presence of Christ. By His Spirit, His own personal presence, Christ can dwell in every believer on earth and fill the heavens as well. Without Christ dwelling in you, there is no amount of witnessing or missionary work that will be acceptable to God, for it will be said of them, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41).

“Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am He: before me there is no God formed, neither shall there be after me” (Isaiah 43:10). Before Christ ascended to heaven, He said to His disciples that they should be witnesses unto Him “both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This was spoken to His disciples for all time; He intended that, in each generation, His disciples should bear witness unto Him, even unto the uttermost part of the earth. His disciples of that time did this in their generation: their faith was “spoken of throughout the whole world” (Romans 1:8); the gospel which they preached “was preached to every creature under heaven” (Colossians 1:23).

The reason of this was that they had the power to do it. Jesus said to them, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Indeed, the Holy Spirit, that is, the very Spirit of Christ (Galatians 4:6), who is Christ Himself, did come upon them; they did receive the power. And having power to be witnesses unto the uttermost part of the earth, it was easy so to witness. And that is true yet. Any church that has the power to witness unto Christ to the uttermost part of the earth

can witness unto the uttermost part of the earth. It will not be difficult to do what she has the power to do. The only reason that the church in any age has not witnesses in that age to the uttermost part of the earth, is simply because she did not have the power to do it. That is what she existed for; but she could not do it, because she did not have the power. And she did not have the power because she would not have the Spirit of Christ to come upon her.

Now, in this day and age, our church must witness unto Christ unto the uttermost part of the earth. That is solely what she exists for. But she cannot do it without the power. Men may talk and plan and work till doomsday; but the thing can never be truly done without the power to do it. And the power to do it lies solely in having the Spirit of Christ come upon the disciples. And when the Holy Spirit does come upon us, making us witnesses, then he also himself is a witness with us. We are to witness unto Jesus Christ risen from the dead, and alive now, though once dead. This is that to which the disciples then witnessed, and to which the Holy Spirit witnessed; and this is that to which the disciples must always witness – a risen, living Saviour. The disciples said, “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses” (Acts 2:32). They said, “the Prince of Life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses” (Acts 3:15). “And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him” (Acts 5:32).

The Holy Spirit witnesses with the believer who witnesses that Christ is risen from the dead, and is alive and at the right hand of God, to shed forth repentance, forgiveness, and power. It is a great and mischievous mistake to think that those disciples who were then in Jerusalem, and who saw Him with their natural eyes, were the only ones who could, or were expected to, witness to the resurrection of Christ. We today are expected to witness to this same thing. We must witness that He is risen, and is alive today. We must witness that He is at the right hand of God, exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31). We can do it. We can do it because we know Him, the living Saviour, with whom we live. We can do it because He lives with us. We can do it because we know that He is in us, and we in Him; and this we know by His very Spirit, which is given us. We can do it because He has given us the power, in giving us His own Spirit.

How do you know that the Spirit of Christ has come upon you and you are ready to go and witness? If you truly want to know, pray thus: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts” (Psalm 139:23); then answer the soul searching questions: Do you know that the very Spirit of Christ is with you to witness unto the things which you testify of Christ? Can you cite that Holy Spirit as witness with you in what you witness unto Christ? If not, why not? And if you cannot, then is it not because you are not, and are conscious that you are not, a true witness? And if you are not a true witness, then you are not a witness at all for Christ. A witness is to testify to the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; he himself is to be true. “Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD;” Are you? Are you true? You can know. Here is the test: “He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him” (John 7:18). And we are witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Spirit. Will you be a true witness? What spirit is witnessing in you? Will you recognise the Spirit of Christ as a witness also with you? “Try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1). To have the Spirit of God in order to be a true witness, “Ask, and it shall be given you” (Matthew 7:7), then “Receive ye the Holy Ghost” (John 20:22), and you will recognise the Holy Spirit.

True witnesses: “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). The kingdom is not to be gained by our efforts. It is to be given to them that “fear not.” Let your mind dwell in prayerful meditation upon the infinite love of God toward you in Christ. Think of the “exceeding great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4), of the Spirit of Christ in your heart (Galatians 4:6), of the holy angels that are encamped about you (Psalm 34:7) – think of all these blessings and “fear not.” Fear not the want of temporal good, because “my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). Fear not the power of Satan. Greater is He that is for you than all that are against you (Romans 8:31; 1 John 4:4). Our mighty God fights our battles; then why fear? Fear not that the Lord will forsake you. He says, “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands,” hence “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Isaiah 49:16; Hebrews 13:5).