

THE THINGS FREELY GIVEN, AND THE SPIRIT BY WHOM THEY ARE MADE KNOWN

Preached in West Street Chapel, Brighton, on Thursday Evening, August 14, 1856

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." 1 Cor. 2:12

In the beginning of my experience in the things of God, which is now more than twenty-nine years ago **c. 1826**, I had this truth impressed upon my conscience, as I have reason to believe, very powerfully and very distinctly, by the finger of God—that I could know nothing, but by divine teaching; have nothing, but by divine giving; and be nothing, but by divine making. And this truth thus impressed upon my conscience, so far from being erased by any subsequent experience, either of myself or of the Lord, has only been more and more deepened from that time to this. I think I can at times see the wisdom, as well as the goodness, of God, in tracing that truth on my heart in the first beginnings of grace; for I can perceive several benefits springing out of it. Just at that time my natural mind was very strongly bent upon human knowledge, for I had spent many years in various studies; and had it not been counteracted by divine teaching, I might have attempted to make myself a Christian, as I had previously made myself a linguist.

Again, it set grace as a divine jewel in my heart's affections; and compared with it, every thing else, in my eyes, was but dung and dross. A third benefit which I see at times to have sprung out of it, was, that it brought me to admire grace in others, wherever I might see it. It not only brought me down to stand on a level with the most ignorant and uneducated

who possessed grace, but very often in my soul's feelings sunk me very far below them; for I could see in them clearly that grace which darkness of mind had often hidden from myself. Grace in the first instance having thus been commended to my conscience, it has taught me ever since so to esteem, admire, and love it, wherever I can recognize it. Nor do I think that I should be very far from the mark, if I say that the apostle Paul, though I would not be so presumptuous as to compare myself for a moment with him, was not of a different mind, for who so much as he exalted the grace of God, and the teaching and testimony of the blessed Spirit.

What I have thus far said may form an introduction to the words of my text: in opening up which, I shall, by God's blessing, call your attention to four prominent points, that seem, to my mind, to stand visibly out of it.

I. What "**the spirit of the world,**" is, which the apostle declares that "**we,**" meaning thereby himself and fellow-believers, "**have not received.**"

II. What "the Spirit which is of God," is, and what it is to "receive" it.

III. "The things that are freely given to us of God."

IV. The way whereby we come to "know" them.

I. We draw a distinction between "the world" and "the **spirit** of the world." Of "the world," God's own testimony is, that "it lieth in wickedness," or "in the wicked one." "The world," viewed as a corporate body, is one mass of evil—a vast aggregate of the corruption seething and swelling in millions of human hearts. But it is not "the world" that we have so

much to fear; it is "the spirit of the world" which the apostle here speaks of. That is ever our greatest enemy, and the just source of our truest dread.

Let me help our conception, here, by a figure. In this street lies a dead corpse; in another rolls along a noisome sewer; in a third is a person lying in bed afflicted with small pox. It is not the dead corpse, the noisome sewer, or the diseased person, that could infect us, if there were no effluvium, no emanation, no miasma given off, by these various objects. Nor again would the dead corpse, the noisome sewer, the person ill of small pox infect with illness the passer by, unless there were a certain principle in his blood or constitution with which the miasma or effluvium that is given off intermingles, and their union produces disease. Just so spiritually. The world would not hurt us if there were no giving off of a noisome influence; and it is this influence, which is "the spirit of the world." As therefore the world gives off this influence, and this spirit mixes with the seeds of corruption in our carnal mind, sin is the consequence of their intermingling, just as disease is the consequence of infection reaching the natural body. Therefore, as we would go to the windward side of the dead corpse, give a wide berth to the reeking sewer, and not, unless compelled by duty or affection, approach the patient ill of typhus fever, so would this man of God caution us against going near the world, lest, sensibly or insensibly, we be contaminated by "the spirit" or influence which the world gives off.

But I think that the apostle here is not speaking so much of the spirit of the world viewed as **profane**, for the saints of God for the most part are preserved from open evil; as of "the spirit of the world" carried into religion; in other words, the spirit of the **professing** world; for as pride, self-seeking, and self-indulgence, are characteristics of a worldly spirit in

natural things, when the same spirit is carried into the things of religion, it exerts a similar influence on the professing church. The spirit in fact is just the same. As Satan transformed into an angel of light is Satan still, so the spirit of the world is the same in a dead profession as in a profane ungodliness.

Now the world being altogether in a state of opposition to God, being filled with deadly enmity against his truth, people, principles, precepts, and ways, and thus diametrically opposed to everything which God delights in, this spirit of the world naturally and necessarily interferes with everything in the spiritual mind that is for the glory of God, or for the good of the soul. Therefore the apostle says boldly, "We have not received the spirit of the world:" such a spirit as the world breathes, be it pride, self-righteousness, self-seeking, or self-dependence, such a spirit never came from God. Such a spirit exists, and the world is full of it; but we, children and saints of God, "have not received this spirit" from above; it never came to us in regeneration; it never was breathed into our hearts by the Spirit's operations; it never came with a holy afflatus from God: if it come, if it influence, or infect, it comes from the world around us, or the world within us, and we have nothing spiritually to do with it; we discard it; we disown it; we will not recognize it as coming from God.

By this mainly those who are alive unto God are distinguished from those dead in profession. Were this profession duly analysed, it would be found to be a worldly spirit carried into religion. The same spirit that breathes in the world at large, and is given off in clouds of infectious vapour, enters into the courts of Zion: the same pride, covetousness, worldly-mindedness, self-exaltation, self-indulgence, that live and move in the world at large, the very breath of the carnal nostrils, act in a religious form, come

disguised with a professing mask, array themselves in a gospel garb, and claim to be "the Spirit of God." Whereas if its true character were laid bare, it would be found to be "the spirit of the world," only all the worse because dressed in a gospel dress, christened with a gospel name, and assuming gospel pretensions. But, says the apostle, this spirit "we have not received." We hate its pretensions: we disown its influence; we discard it; we trample it under our feet: we cannot keep altogether from it, but we will not take it into our bosoms: we see it pervading the whole world, but we will keep as separate from it as possible.

II. But I pass on to shew the opposite of this; for the apostle here draws the grand, distinguishing line betwixt receiving "the spirit of the world," which men do in a profession of religion, and receiving "the Spirit of God," which is the distinguishing characteristic of the saints of Zion. The professing church, under cover of religion, receives "the spirit of the world," which they mistake for "the Spirit which is of God;" but the children of Zion, the saints of God, those who are taught of the Most High, receive the Spirit of God, which is as distinct in birth and origin, and in consequences, fruits, and effects, from the spirit of the world, as Christ from Belial, or heaven from hell.

i. Let us look for a few moments at what **"the spirit which is of God"** is, and what it is **to "receive"** it. "The Spirit of God" means the Holy Ghost; the Third Person in the glorious Godhead; the Promised Comforter; the Divine Teacher: the inward Intercessor, of all the election of grace: and "the Spirit of God" is "received" when communicated, when the Lord Jesus Christ, who "ascended up on high, and received gifts for men," pours it forth. But for the most part when "received." we can only know it by the effects it produces on

the heart and conscience. These are great, signal, memorable.

I cannot think that a revolution, which changes the current of a man's thoughts: which makes him altogether a new creature: which turns his face from hell to heaven: I cannot think a revolution of this kind can take place in a man's heart, and leave no trace in mind or memory: that a man is to get up in the morning as he lay down at night, and have had a mighty revolution take place in his soul and know nothing about it: where it met him; what it produced: what feelings were created, what effects were wrought. Surely the Spirit's work must be felt. If a finger ache, or a nerve be out of tune: if we stumble against a stone, or have a twinge of rheumatism, some feeling is communicated: and shall we receive "the Spirit of God," and experience a mighty revolution from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, and yet know nothing about it, in some degree, at least, where and when it commenced, and what effects were produced thereby?

I do not mean to say that all the saints of God can trace, with equal clearness, when, where, and how God began his mighty work upon the soul: but it is a mystery to me, that a man can pass through such a mighty revolution as grace effects, and yet not know somewhere about the time when the revolution began in his soul. If we have received the Spirit of God, we received certain operations, which manifest themselves in sensations, and it is by looking at these, that we can recognize in ourselves, or others, the beginning of this mighty revolution, that we can watch its progress, and see its results. Let us examine some of them.

Whensoever the Spirit of God is received, it is as the **spirit of conviction**, and especially of the sin of unbelief. Can a

man have eternal things laid upon his conscience—have his soul brought to the bar of an offended God—have righteousness laid to the line, and judgment to the plummet—can a man see what the law of God requires, in its breadth and spirituality—and yet have no feeling under it? Why if the Spirit of God convinces a man of sin, wounds his heart, and pricks him to the quick, there must be some feeling under its convictions. In times of old, they cried out, "What shall we do to be saved?" The publican said, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." and the effects produced in the conscience, when the blessed Spirit leads a man down into the depths of the fall, may be seen in the Psalms and Lamentations, in the sorrows of Job, the complaints of Hezekiah, the mournings of Heman **Ps 88**, and the confessions of Asaph.

But we receive the Spirit of God, also, as a **spirit of grace and supplication**, whereby we pour out our souls before God, with sighs, groans, tears, and many a wrestling at a throne of grace, and you cannot give over till Christ is revealed as the power of God. It was so with me, when the Lord began with my soul; there were all these cries, tears, supplications. I used to ride nearly every day on horseback those days, and being in much mental trouble, as well as spiritual labour, the pommel of my saddle has often been wet with my tears, in seeking the Lord, amid the wild glens and dales of Ireland, where I was living at the time of the first beginnings of grace. And from my own feelings and experience, I have ever contended that it is the living soul that cries, and that none of God's children are still-born.

Again. In receiving the Spirit of God, we receive it as a **spirit of faith**. Some assert there is no faith in the soul till Christ is revealed, and mercy manifested. But tell me, if you can, what it is that believes the justice of God? what it is that

trembles at his sovereign majesty? what it is that apprehends his dreadful wrath? what it is that comes unto him with sighs, cries, and groans? If it be not faith, what is it? The apostle says, "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Now tell me, whether a soul that cometh unto God in prayer and supplication, has faith or not? Is it unbelief that prompts the prayer? raises up his cries? makes him seek for mercy? If not unbelief, what is it? Is it despair, superstition, self-righteousness, or presumption? These are the spirit of the world acting under a religious garb; but this we have not received. It is then a living faith: but not acting upon a revealed Christ, for Christ is not yet revealed; not acting upon pardon of sin, because pardon of sin is not manifested: but it is a living faith, as much as when the soul enjoys the full manifestation of God's love.

Look at the hand of a babe—how tender, how weak. I remember when my first child was born, looking at the little finger, it struck me, how weak it was. But these weak fingers how they expand and grow: and in a male infant, into the hand of a large man. The waterman on the beach, who pulls his boat with so strong and muscular a hand, had once little, tiny fingers. Is that hand which grapples the oar amidst the stormy wave, a different hand from those tiny fingers which the infant had when it hung upon its mother's breast? And is the faith in a Christian's soul, which lays hold of pardon and peace through the blood of Christ, different from that which apprehends the majesty of God in a broken law? Can you find two faiths in a spiritual man? It must be the same faith, for I read of only "one faith," as well as "one Lord," and "one baptism."

In receiving the Spirit of God, we receive him, then, as a spirit of faith; and as the hand to which faith is compared,

grasps the object which is put within its hand, whether small or great, hot or cold, so faith in the living soul lays hold of that which God puts into it; and as it is the same eye that views different objects, sometimes beautiful, sometimes terrible; sometimes gazing upon the sea ruffled with storms, and sometimes, like yesterday, smiling under the beams of the sun—so it is by the same eye of faith that the sinner views the majesty of God in a broken law, and the smile of a loving Father in a gracious gospel.

As the Lord leads the soul along, opens up the truth, sets before it the plan of salvation, applies some sweet promise to the heart, we receive the Spirit of God as a **spirit of hope**; an anchor which enters into that within the veil.

As Christ is revealed and made manifest to the soul by the power of God, the Spirit is given as a **spirit of wisdom and revelation** in the knowledge of Christ, and thus we come to know him and the power of his resurrection.

When he is enshrined in the heart, and made dear and precious, and the love of God comes with him into the soul, the Spirit of God is received as a **spirit of love**.

When there is a view of him in the garden, and upon the cross, and the eyes flow with tears, and the heart melts with godly sorrow for sin, we receive him as a **spirit of contrition and evangelical repentance**.

When the eyes are enlightened, and we see blessed things in God's truth, we receive him as a **spirit of understanding**. It is not a different spirit, but the same Spirit of God in his various operations, teaching and leading us into one truth after another, and establishing our souls in faith, hope, and love in them, and towards them—and all this

in a sovereign way, for we only receive the Spirit just as God is pleased to communicate it to us. As then the children of Israel gathered the manna in the wilderness, so that "he who had gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack," so in the reception of the Spirit, none can boast over his neighbour, "I have more grace than thou." All receive their measure of the Spirit, as the apostle says, "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ;" and are by it baptized into the same body, and united to the same glorious Head.

Thus, no one member of the mystical body of Christ can glory over another. Shall my little finger be discontented because it is not my thumb? and my thumb because it is not my hand? and my hand because it is not my arm? Are not all these content with possessing each its appointed place, and performing each its office, for the good of the body? So with the Church of Jesus Christ, the family of God, the election of grace, all the members of the mystical body of Christ occupy their destined place, and perform their appointed function. This is beautifully traced out in **1Co 12**, where these blessed truths are written as with a ray of light.

III. But I pass on to our third point, which is "**the things that are freely given to us of God.**" We must never, and shall never, if rightly taught, view God as doleing out his gifts, as a churchwarden doles out parish allowance; grudging the bread as he places it into the pauper's hand, and doleing out penny after penny, as though he was drawing his own blood from his veins. Such paltry, miserable views we are not to entertain of the merciful Majesty of heaven. He is a kind and loving Father to his people, and he does not grudgingly dole out his favours, as if he measured his grace by their deserts. I have thought sometimes of the sweet figure of Solomon, as a type of Christ, in his royal

munificence to the queen of Sheba. We read of him that he "gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, besides that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty." So our Royal Benefactor gives more to the sons of men than is in their heart to ask for. And what he gives, he gives freely, out of his royal bounty. As freely as the rain drops from the sky; as freely as the sun casts forth his glorious beams and ripens the fruits of the field: as freely as the wind courses over the earth: as freely as the dew drops upon the morning grass: so free are the gifts of God to his Church and people: freely given, not niggardly or grudgingly doled out.

i. But what are the things freely given? The first, and that which comprehends all the rest, is the **gift of his dear Son**. In giving Christ, he gave every thing. The apostle declares, he "hath blessed us with **all** spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." We must never look upon spiritual blessings as broken fragments of the love of God, mere shreds and patches, scattered crumbs, waifs and strays, like floating pieces of some shipwrecked vessel; but we must look on the blessings of the gospel as all stored up in Christ our covenant Head. Whatever is given, is given out of Christ, in whom it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell; and it is by virtue of union to him, and out of his fulness, that all these blessings are received. The apostle therefore beautifully says, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

How can we lift up our thoughts—how raise up our hearts—adequately to conceive of the gift of God's only-begotten Son—his eternal Son—the Son of the Father in truth and love—given out of the bosom of God that he might become incarnate, suffer, bleed, and die; and by a suffering life, and

meritorious death, offer a sacrifice acceptable to God, a sacrifice whereby the sins of God's people were for ever put away. The grand source of all the admiration and adoration and the eternal blessedness of the saints, will be the holy enjoyment of the mystery of an incarnate God. The incarnation of the second person in the glorious Trinity—the eternal Son of the eternal Father—his taking human nature into union with his own divine person—will be the mystery that will ravish the hearts and fill the lips of God's saints with an endless theme of admiration and joy through the countless ages of a never-ending eternity. In this mystery of an incarnate God—in this gift of God's dear Son—every other blessing that the Church can receive, or has received, is treasured up and contained: and, with God's blessing, we will look at a few of these things freely given.

1. One is **ETERNAL LIFE**. Has your soul ever anticipated in any degree the pleasurable sensation and prospect of eternal life? I remember when I was in the Church of England, and, be it known, I was neither a dead man or a dead minister then, for if I have the life of God in my soul now, I had it then: and I have living witnesses that my ministry then was blessed to the quickening of souls. But when in the Church of England, I had one day to bury a little child; one of the sweetest children in the poorer walks of life that I ever knew. The funeral being a little delayed, I stood at the grave till they brought the corpse for me to bury; I was very poorly in body, but favoured in soul: I looked into the grave, and felt, O how sweet to lie down there; I never shall be happy in this life; it is but a scene of affliction and sorrow, and I never shall have a body free from sickness and sin till I have a glorified body. How sweet to look forward to a happy eternity! What a glorious prospect, when realized by faith—eternal bliss in the presence of God; joy for evermore in that happy, eternal home.

2. Again; **RECONCILIATION WITH GOD BY THE BLOOD OF HIS DEAR SON**; that we, who were enemies to God by wicked works, should be reconciled and brought near; that sin should be put away; the grand cause of strife for ever removed; and a sense of this bringing peace into the heart. O what a free gift is this!

3. **JUSTIFICATION BY CHRIST'S SPOTLESS OBEDIENCE, SO** as to stand before the throne of God without spot, or blemish, or any such thing; every sin pardoned through the blood-shedding of the Incarnate God; and the robe of imputed righteousness put on and received by faith. This is one of the things freely given to us of God.

4. **ADOPTION**: the adoption of children unto himself, whereby the family of God are manifested as sons and daughters of the Most High. This is a gift freely given of God; for who could merit or claim such wondrous grace as this?

5. **AN INHERITANCE AMONG THE SAINTS**, of which God himself is the substance: heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ: an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. This is not the least amongst the things freely given of God.

6. **POWER**, in a measure, at least, **OVER SIN**: SO that it is subdued, not suffered to reign: according to that divine declaration, "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." No man ever yet subdued his own sins, or came off conqueror in his own strength. It is the free gift of God, received out of Christ's fulness.

7. FINAL VICTORY OVER DEATH AND HELL; the king of terrors put to flight, and heaven opened in sweet anticipation; the pleasures of God's right hand revealed to the eyes of the astonished soul. This is another thing freely given to the saints of God.

The blessings of the gospel, in fact, are as numerous as the stars in the midnight sky, or the sands upon the sea shore. Take all the blessings with which God has blessed the Church, in every place, with every testimony, every token, every smile, every manifestation, every ray of comfort bestowed upon the election of grace, from the days of righteous Abel to the end of the world, all are comprehended and embraced in "the things freely given to us of God;" for they all flow from eternal, unchangeable love: they are all stored up in the fulness of Christ, and from his fulness are they all received by the heirs of glory. There is nothing too great for you to ask, if your soul is under right teaching; for the Spirit of God intercedeth for us with groanings, which cannot be uttered. "Open your mouth wide," says God, "and I will fill it." There is enough in Christ for all the wants of his people; for all their troubles, trials, afflictions. Though you may sink in your feelings to the gates of hell, in Christ you shall rise again to the gates of heaven. There is no pit of misery into which you may fall, but the power of Christ can extricate you there from: no danger from which there is not deliverance for you in "the things freely given you of God."

IV. The last point is, **KNOWING THE THINGS FREELY GIVEN US OF GOD.** What thick clouds of darkness spread themselves at times over our souls: all things out of sight: our signs and tokens buried, as it were, in mist. It is like a sea fog, that comes out of the bosom of the vast deep, and hides all objects from view. The ships are on the sea, notwithstanding, but this deep fog prevents their being seen.

So with our souls at times, all is misty, cloudy, and no signs can be seen of the work of God upon our hearts. And yet we "know" them, by receiving the Spirit of God, for it is the only way whereby they can be known. We can only see light in God's light; only believe by God's faith: only love by God's love: therefore we can only know the things freely given to us of God by the revelation of the Spirit. What we know savingly, experimentally, feelingly, we know only by divine teaching.

The apostle prayed that God would bestow upon the Ephesians the spirit of prayer and revelation in the knowledge of him, and that the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened. How dark our mind often is; how low we sink at times; it is only the Son of God that can enable us to rise; only by the revelation of his Spirit to believe that we are his. We know he is God when he shines forth, as we know the sun when it blazes forth in the summer sky. We know him by the teaching of the Spirit, but cannot see him till our eyes are divinely opened. The sun may shine in all its glory—does that communicate light to the eyes of the blind? or warm the corpse lying in the coffin? The blind see not; the dead hear not; the living, the living alone see and know the Son of God.

Thus you see that what I stated in the beginning, I have kept consistently to, to the end. It was written on my conscience in early life; it is written now. We can know nothing but by the teaching of God the Holy Spirit. Will this lead to carelessness, presumption, Antinomianism? Some men wrest truth to their own destruction; but a child of God will not do so; he feels his ignorance before God; he is drawn by the Spirit of God into prayer and supplication, that he may teach him, lead him, reveal Christ in him. The dead in sin harden themselves, like clay, unto more ungodliness, by the same

sun by which others are melted into repentance and love. But shall we blame the Scriptures—the God who revealed and inspired, and the Holy Ghost who applies, precious truth to the heart, giving us to know the things freely given to us of God.'? We must clear God from all fault in this matter. Let God be true, and every man a liar. He will clear himself: none shall arraign him—and woe to the man who lifts a finger against the Majesty of heaven! It is a fearful war to be engaged in. If the people of Israel prevailed against the children of Amalek, surely the God of Israel will prevail in his war against all contenders against his power. If any fight against God and truth, it is to their own destruction, misery, and woe! Bless his holy name if any of us are brought down to acquiesce in his goodness, mercy, and love. The Lord bless the word spoken, for his name's sake. Amen.