

“Concerning Spiritual Gifts” Part II
“The Protection of the Doctrine of the Holy Ghost”

Last week we looked at the Importance of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost reveals to us the presence of the Living Lord among us here. The Holy Ghost relates us to Christ in His saving power. It relates us by the gifts of faith in Him and hope in Him and in the love which gives without counting the cost – *agape*’ – love by which we are loved by Him. (Copies of that sermon are on the back bench, if you would care to take one.) So far as I could tell, no one was upset or offended by what was said about the Holy Ghost last Sunday. And I consider that very important, because I know some of you have been deeply hurt and offended by what is known today as the “charismatic movement”.

I think what tends to offend some people is that the doctrine of the Holy Ghost is some– times taken out of context, away from the other doctrines of Christianity, that is, when the attempt is made to make the doctrine of the Holy Ghost a religion in itself. And this has been a tendency through the history of the Church. Shortly after the Revolutionary War, according to William Warren Sweet, the dean of American Church historians, a denomination in the mountains of Kentucky decided they could get along without the Bible – they would just get all their inspiration direct! And in our time, this is much the same thing that James Jones did in Jonestown, Guiana. Even before he left California, James Jones had not only discarded the Bible, he had – according to one who was there – thrown the Bible on the floor, stomped on it and cursed it! In Jonestown, he was not guided by the Bible, but was making every effort to take his community to Communist Russia when the end came! The problems arise when the attempt is made to separate the Holy Ghost from the other two Persons of the Trinity – the Father and the Son – and make a separate religion of this doctrine.

Because we do believe in the Holy Ghost, the doctrine needs to be protected from error. And that is what St. Paul is doing in our Epistle today. This morning I want to look with you at the way St. Paul protects this doctrine, both from within and without. And to see how he does this is going to take some work on your part. So, if you will take your Bible and turn to I Corinthians, the 12th chapter. That is the Epistle we had last Sunday, and it begins: “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.” Thus St. Paul introduces 3 chapters on the doctrine of the Holy Ghost. Chapter 12 has to do with the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Chapter 14 speaks of talking in strange tongues, a gift he puts at the very bottom of the list. And in between chapters 12 and 14, St. Paul presents the magnificent 13th Chapter on Christian love – *agape*’ – and the three most important gifts of the Spirit: faith, hope, and charity, “and the greatest of these is charity”. To these Corinthians – who, as Gentiles, did not have the long heritage of the inspiration of the Spirit in the Old Testament and who were living in the “sin city” of the Roman world – to these Corinthians St. Paul is saying, strive for the best gifts of the Spirit. Don’t get sidetracked by some of these other things. The most important gifts are faith, hope, and charity. Strive for them. Thus St. Paul protects the doctrine from within.

Now let us look at how St. Paul protects the doctrine of the Holy Ghost from outside. Look first at Chapter 11 and then at Chapter 15, which contains our Epistle for today. In Chapter 11, St. Paul is talking about the Lord’s Supper. “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread...” (I Cor. 11:23) Now, turn all the way over to Chapter 15, verses 3 – 5. In almost the same words as in Chapter 11 St. Paul says, “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve...” In this passage, he presents the heart of the Gospel, what is sometimes referred to as the *kerygma*, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. Thus St. Paul protects the doctrine of the Holy Ghost from without, by containing it between the Lord’s Supper and the Crucifixion and Resurrection. The Holy Ghost does not operate on His own. The Holy Ghost testifies of

Christ.

And the Holy Ghost leads us to the Cross of Christ and to our own crosses, as His disciples. And one of the great examples of the power of the Holy Ghost is the change that was wrought in St. Peter. You remember, at the time of Jesus' arrest, Simon Peter followed his Lord into the courtyard where the trial was to begin. And a servant girl identified Peter as being "with Him", and Peter was terrified and denied it. And then he denied his Lord twice more. He was afraid and defeated. But then after the Crucifixion and Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, when the Holy Ghost came down at Pentecost, Simon Peter was a changed man!

On the very day of Pentecost, Simon Peter went before the very people who had condemned his Lord and spoke. Notice, please, this is the first speech we have recorded in the New Testament, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. The Book of Acts records that on the day of Pentecost, the many visitors in Jerusalem from all over the Mediterranean world were astonished to hear the Gospel preached in their own native languages. Those from Syria heard their own language, and those from Crete; those from Rome heard Roman and those from Greece heard Greek. They heard their native languages, but nothing is said about the content of what was said. In St. Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost, we get the content:

"Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it."

Acts 2:22-24.

Here we see the power of the Holy Ghost! St. Peter, who before was afraid and defeated, is now courageous and confident and, in Christ, victorious! And with this speech, before the very rulers

who had condemned his Lord to death, St. Peter was laying his own life on the line.

This is the kind of witness that appeals to me. And this kind of speech does not need an "interpreter" does it? And this is not in what Archbishop Temple refers to as "gibberish". And we don't have to worry about St. Peter rolling around on the carpet and getting rug burn! No-- thing about being "slain in the spirit". St. Peter, speaking under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is courageously witnessing for his Lord, and, in doing so, is laying his life on the line.

The Holy Ghost leads us to the Cross of Christ and to our crosses, and the Holy Ghost gives us the power to bear them. Let us pray: "Send, we beseech thee, Almighty God, thy Holy Spirit into our hearts, that He may direct and rule us according to thy will, comfort us in all our afflictions, defend us from all error, and lead us into all truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the same Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

(A Sermon preached at All Saints Church, Pensacola, Fla., on Sunday, August 15th, 1999, by The Rev. Hugh B. Hall, Jr.)

