

CHAPTER XVI.

**THE MINISTRY OF
THE NEW COVENANT**

“Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men: being made manifest that ye are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God: not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh. And such confidence have we through Christ Godward: not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God: who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant; not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.” 2 Cor. 3. 2-6.

WE have seen that the New Covenant is a ministration of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit ministers all its grace and blessing in Divine power and life. (It may be well to read again and compare Chapter VII.: “The New Covenant: a Ministration of the Spirit.”) He does this through men, who are called ministers of a New Covenant, ministers of the Spirit. The Divine ministration of the Covenant to men, and the earthly ministry of God’s servants, are equally to be in the power of the

Holy Spirit. The ministry of the New Covenant has its glory and its fruit in this, that it is all to be a demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

What a contrast this to the Old Covenant. Moses had indeed received of the glory of God shining upon him, but had to put a veil on his face. Israel was incapable of looking on it. In hearing and reading Moses, there was a veil on their hearts. From Moses they might receive knowledge and thoughts and desires, -the power of God's Spirit, to enable them to see the glory of what God speaks, was not yet given. This is the exceeding glory of the New Covenant, that it is a ministration of the Spirit; that its ministers have their sufficiency from God, who makes them ministers of the Spirit, and makes them able so to speak the words of God in the Spirit, that they are written in the heart, and that the hearers become legible, living epistles of Christ, showing the law written in their heart and life.

The ministry of the Spirit! What a glory there is in it! What a responsibility it brings! What a sufficiency of grace there is provided for it! What a privilege, to be a minister of the Spirit!

What tens of thousands we have throughout Christendom who are called ministers of the gospel. What an inconceivable influence they exert for life or for death over the millions who depend upon them for their knowledge and participation of the Christian life. What a power there would be if all these were ministers of the Spirit! Let us study the word, until we see what God meant the ministry to be, and learn to take our part in praying and labouring to have it nothing less.

God hath made us ministers of the Spirit. The first thought is that a minister of the New Covenant must be a man personally possessed of the Holy Spirit. There is a twofold work of the Spirit: one in giving a holy disposition and character, the other in qualifying and empowering a man for work. The former must always come first. The promise of Christ to His disciples, that they should receive the Holy Spirit for their service, was very definitely given to those who had followed and loved Him, and kept His commandments. It is by no means enough that a man have been born of the Spirit. If he is to be a “sufficient minister” of the New Covenant, he must know what it is to be led by the Spirit, to walk in the Spirit, and to say, “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” Who that wants to learn Greek or Hebrew would accept a professor who hardly knows the elements of these languages? And how can a man be a minister of the New Covenant, which is so entirely “a ministration of the Spirit,” a ministration of heavenly life and power, unless he knows by experience what it is to live in the Spirit? The minister must, before everything, be a personal proof and witness of the truth and power of God in the fulfilment of what the New Covenant promises. Ministers are to be picked men; the best specimens and examples of what the Holy Spirit can do to sanctify a man, and by the working of God’s power in him to fit him for His service.

God hath made us ministers of the Spirit. Next to this thought, of being personally possessed by the Spirit, comes the truth that all their work in the ministry can be done in the power of the Spirit. What an unspeakably precious assurance –Christ sends them to do a heavenly work, to do His work, to be the instruments in His hands, by which He works, He clothes them with a heavenly power. Their calling is “to preach the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.” As far as feelings are concerned, they may

have to say as Paul: "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." That does not prevent their adding, nay rather, that may just be the secret of their being able to add: "My preaching was in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." If a man is to be a minister of the New Covenant, a messenger and a teacher of its true blessing, so as to lead God's children to live in it, nothing less will do than a full experience of its power in himself, as the Spirit ministers it. Whether in his feeding on God's word himself, or his seeking in it for God's message for his people, whether in secret or intercessory prayer, whether in private intercourse with souls or public teaching, he is to wait upon, to receive, to yield to the energizing of the Holy Spirit, as the mighty power of God working with him. This is his sufficiency for the work. He may every day afresh claim and receive the anointing with fresh oil, the new inbreathing from Christ of His own Spirit and life.

God hath made us ministers of the Spirit. There is something still, of no less importance. The Minister of the Spirit must especially see to it that he lead men to the Holy Spirit. Many will say, If he be led of the Spirit in teaching men, is not that enough? By no means. Men may become too dependent on him; men may take his Scripture teaching at second-hand, and, while there is power and blessing in his ministry, have reason to wonder that the results are not more definitely spiritual and permanent. The reason is simple. The New Covenant is: they shall no longer every man teach his brother, know the Lord, for all shall know Me, from the least even to the greatest. The Father wants every child, from the least, to live in continual personal intercourse with Himself. This cannot be, except as he is taught and helped to know and wait on the Holy Spirit. Bible study and prayer, faith and love and obedience, the whole daily walk must be taught as entirely dependent on the teaching and working of the indwelling Spirit.

The minister of the Spirit, very definitely and perseveringly, points away from himself to the Spirit. This is what John the Baptist did. He was filled with the Holy Spirit from his birth, but sent men away from himself to Christ, to be by Him baptized with the Spirit. Christ did the same. In His farewell discourse He called His disciples to turn from His personal instruction to the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit, who should dwell in them, and guide them into the truth and power of all He had taught them.

There is nothing so needed in the Church to-day. All its feebleness and formalities and worldliness, the lack of holiness, of personal devotion to Christ, of enthusiasm for His cause and kingdom, is owing to one thing—the Holy Spirit is not known and honoured and yielded to, as the one only, as the one all-sufficient source of a holy life. The New Covenant is not known as a ministration of the Spirit in the heart of every believer. The one thing needful for the Church is the Holy Spirit in His power dwelling and ruling in the lives of God's saints. And as one of the chief means to this there are needed ministers of the Spirit, themselves living in the enjoyment and power of this great gift, who persistently labour to bring their brethren into the possession of their birthright: the Holy Spirit in the heart, maintaining, in Divine power, an unceasing communion with the Son and with the Father. The ministration of the Spirit makes the ministry of the Spirit possible and effectual. And the ministry of the Spirit again makes the ministration of the Spirit an actual experimental reality in the life of the Church.

We know how dependent the Church is on its ministry. The converse is no less true. The ministers are dependent on the Church. They are its children; they breathe its atmosphere; they share its health or sickliness; they are dependent upon its fellowship and intercession. Let none of us think that all that the New Covenant calls us to is

to see that we personally accept and rejoice in its blessings. No, indeed; God wants everyone who enters into it to know that its privileges are for all His children, and to give himself to make this known. And there is no more effectual way of doing this than taking thought for the ministry of the Church. Compare the ministry around you with its pattern in God's word (see specially 1 Cor. 2.; 2 Cor. 3.). Join with others who know how the New Covenant is nothing, if it be not a ministration of the Spirit, and cry to God for a spiritual ministry. Ask the leading of God the Holy Ghost to teach you what can be done, what you can do, to have the ministry of your Church become a truly spiritual one. Human condemnation will do as little good as human approbation. It is as the supreme place of the Holy Spirit, as the representative and revealer of the Father and the Son, is made clear to us, that the one desire of our heart, and our continual prayer, will be, that God would so discover to all the ministers of His word their heavenly calling, that they may, above everything, seek this one thing, –to be sufficient ministers of the New Covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit.