

## VIII.

**Gifts and Talents.**

“And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him.”—*Judges iii. 10.*



We now consider the Holy Spirit's work in bestowing gifts, talents, and abilities upon artisans and professional men. Scripture declares that the special animation and qualification of persons for work assigned to them by God proceed from the Holy Spirit.

The construction of the tabernacle required capable workmen, skilful carpenters, goldsmiths, and silversmiths, and masters in the arts of weaving and embroidering. Who will furnish Moses with them? The Holy Spirit. For we read in *Exod. xxxi. 2, 3*: “I have called by name Bezaleel, the son of Uri . . . and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship.” *Verse 6* shows that this activity of the Holy Spirit included others: “In the hearts of all that are wise-hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded them.” And to give clearest light on this subject, Scripture says also: “Then hath he filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work of the engraver and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer in blue and in purple and in scarlet and in fine linen of the weaver, even of them that do any work and of these that devise cunning work.” (*Exod. xxxv. 35*)

The Spirit's working shows not only in ordinary skilled labor, but also in the higher spheres of human knowledge and mental activity; for military genius, legal acumen, statesmanship, and power to inspire the masses with enthusiasm are equally ascribed to it. This is generally expressed in the words, “And the Spirit of the Lord came upon” such a hero, judge, statesman, or tribune of the people, especially in the days of the judges, when it is said of Joshua, Othniel, Barak, Gideon, Samson, Samuel, and others that the Spirit of the Lord came upon them. Also of Zerubbabel rebuilding the temple, it is said: “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord.” (*Zech. iv. 6*) Even of the heathen king, Cyrus, we read that Jehovah had called him to His work and anointed him with the Spirit of the Lord—*Isa. xlv.*



This last instance introduces another aspect of the case, viz., the operation of the Holy Spirit in qualifying men for *official functions*. For altho this operation upon and through the office receives its fullest significance only in the dispensation of grace, yet the case of Cyrus shows that the Holy Spirit has originally a work to perform in this respect which is not only a result of grace, but belongs essentially to the nature of the work, even tho it is obvious only in the history of God's special dealings with His own people.

It is especially noticeable in the struggle between Saul and David. There is no reason to consider Saul one of God's elect. After his anointing the Holy Spirit comes upon him, abides

with him, and works upon him as long as he remains the Lord's chosen king over His people. But as soon as by wilful disobedience he forfeits that favor, the Holy Spirit departs from him and an evil spirit from the Lord troubles him. Evidently this work of the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with regeneration. For a time it may operate upon a man and then forever depart from him; while the Spirit's saving operation, even tho suspended for a time, can never be wholly lost. David's touching prayer, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me," ([Psalm li. 11](#)) must therefore refer to gifts qualifying him for the kingly office. David had the terrible example of Saul before him. He had seen what becomes of a man whom the Holy Spirit leaves to himself; and his heart trembled at the possibility of an evil spirit coming upon him, and an end as sad as Saul's. Like Judas, Saul dies a suicide.

From the whole Scripture teaching we therefore conclude that the Holy Spirit has a work in connection with mechanical arts and official functions—in every special talent whereby some men excel in such art or office. This teaching is not simply that such gifts and talents are not of man but from God like all other blessings, but that they are not the work of the Father, nor of the Son, but of the Holy Spirit.

The distinction discovered in creation may be observed here: gifts and talents come from the Father; are disposed for each personality by the Son; and kindled in each by the Holy Spirit as by a spark from above.

Let us distinguish *art itself*, *personal talent to practise it*, and the *vocation thereto*.

*Art* is not man's invention, but God's creation. In all nations and ages men have pursued the arts of weaving, embroidering, skilful dressmaking, casting and chasing noble metals, cutting and polishing diamonds, molding iron and brass; and in all these countries and ages, without knowing of each other's efforts, have applied the same arts to all these materials. Of course there is a difference. Oriental work bears a stamp quite different from that of the West. Even French and German work differ. But under the differences, the endeavor, the art applied, the material, the ideal pursued are the same. So, too, art did not attain perfection all at once; among the nations forms at first crude and awkward gradually developed into forms chaste, refined, and beautiful. Successive generations improved upon previous achievements, until among the various nations comparative perfection of art and skill was attained. Hence art is not the result of man's thought and purpose; but God has placed in various materials certain possibilities of workmanship, and by applying this workmanship man must make out of each what there is in it, and not whatever he chooses.

Two things must cooperate to effect this. In the creation of gold, silver, wood, iron, God must have placed in them certain possibilities, and have created inventive power in man's mind, perseverance in his will, strength in his muscle, accurate vision in his eye, delicacy of touch and action in his fingers, thus qualifying him to evolve what is latent in the materials. Since this labor has the same nature among all nations, the perpetual progress of the same great work being accomplished according to the same majestic plan, through successive



generations, all artistic skill and executive ability must be wrought in man by a higher power and according to a higher command. Viewing the treasures of an industrial exposition in the light of the revealed Word, we shall see in their gradual development and genetic unity the downfall of human pride, and exclaim: "What is all this art and skill but the manifestation of the possibilities which God has placed in these materials, and of the powers of mind and eye and finger which He has given the children of men!"

Consider, now, *personal talent* as utterly distinct from *art*.

The goldsmith in his craft and the judge in his office enter upon a work of God. Each labors in his divine vocation, and all the skill and judgment that he may develop therein come from the treasures of the Lord.

Still, workman differs from workman, general from general. The one copies the product of the generation before him and bequeaths it without increasing the artistic skill. He began as an apprentice, and imparts this skill to other apprentices; but the artistic proficiency is the same. The other manifests something akin to genius. He quickly surpasses his master; sees, touches, discovers something new. In his hand art is enriched. It is given him to transfer from the treasures of divine artistic skill new beauties into human skill.

So also of men in office and profession. Thousands of officers trained in our military schools become good teachers of the science of tactics as practised heretofore, but add nothing to it; while among these thousands there may be two or three possessed of military genius who in the event of war will astonish the world by their brilliant exploits.

This talent, this individual genius so intimately connected with man's personality, is a *gift*. No power in the world can create it in the man that possesses it not. The child is born with or without it; if without it, no education nor severity—not even ambition—can call it forth. But as the gift of grace is freely bestowed by the sovereign God, so is also the gift of genius. When the people pray, let them not forget to ask the Lord to raise up among them men of talent, heroes of art and of office.

When in 1870 Germany had victory only, and France defeat only, it was God's sovereignty that gave the former talented generals, and in displeasure denied them to the latter.

Consider the *vocation*.

Official and mechanical men have a high call. All have not the same ability. One is adapted for the sea, another for the plow. One is a bungler in the foundry, but a master at wood-carving, while another is the reverse. This depends upon the personality, nature, and inclination. And since the Holy Spirit lights the personality, He also determines every man's calling to trade or profession. The same applies to the life of nations. The French excel in taste as well as in artistic workmanship; while the English seem created for the sea, our

masters in all the markets of the world. The Holy Spirit even bestows artistic skill and talent upon a nation at one time and withdraws it at another. Three centuries ago Holland surpassed all Europe in weaving, making porcelain, printing, painting, and engraving. But how great the subsequent decline in this respect—alho now progress again appears.

What we find in Israel is related to this. This very thirst and capacity for knowledge had caused man to fall. The first impetus was given to artistic skill among Cain's descendants; the Jubals and the Jabals and the Tubal-Cains were the first artists. And yet this whole development, alho feeding upon the treasures of God, departed more and more from Him, while His own people utterly lacked it. In the days of Samuel there was no smith found in all the land of Canaan. Hence the Spirit's coming upon Bezaleel and Aholiab, upon Othniel and Samson, upon Saul and David; signifies something more than a mere imparting of artistic skill and talent; namely, the restoration of what sin had corrupted and defiled. And thus the illumination of a Bezaleel links the Holy Spirit's work in the material creation and that in the dispensation of grace.



**Third Chapter.**  
**RE-CREATION.**

---

