

XXXI.

Apostolic Inspiration.

“When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth.”—*John xvi. 13.*



What is the nature of the work of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration of the apostles?

Apart from the mechanical and natural theories, which are vulgar and profane, there are two others, viz., the Ethical and the Reformed.

According to the former the inspiration of the apostles differs from the animation of believers only in degree, not in nature. They represent the matter as tho, by the incarnation of the Word, a new sphere of life was created which they call the “*God-human.*” They that have received the life of this higher sphere are called believers; others are unbelievers. In these believers the consciousness is gradually changed, illuminated, and sanctified. Hence they see things in a different light, *i.e.*, their eyes are opened so that they see much of the spiritual world of which unbelievers see nothing. However, this result is not the same in all believers. The more favored see more correctly and distinctly than the less favored. And the most excellent among them, who possess this God-human life most abundantly, and look into the things of the, Kingdom with greatest clearness and distinctness, are the men called apostles. Hence the inspiration of the apostles and the illumination of believers are in principle the same; differing only in degree.

The Reformed churches can not agree with this view. In their judgment the very effort to identify apostolic inspiration with the illumination of believers actually annihilates the former. They hold that the inspiration of the apostles was wholly *unique in nature and kind*, totally different from what the Scripture calls illumination of believers. The apostles possessed this latter gift even in its highest degree, and we heartily indorse all that the Ethical theologians say in this respect. But, when all is said, we hold that apostolic inspiration is not even touched upon; that it lies entirely outside of it; is not contained in, but added to, it; and that the Church must reverence it as an extraordinary, peculiar, and unique work of the Holy Spirit, which was wrought exclusively in the holy apostles.



Hence both sides concede that the apostles were born again, that they had received illumination in a peculiarly high degree. But while the Ethical theorists maintain that this extraordinary illumination includes inspiration, the Reformed hold that illumination in its highest degree has nothing to do with inspiration; which was unique in its kind, without equal, given to the apostles alone; never to other believers.

The difference between the two views is obvious.

According to the Ethical view, the epistles are the writings of very worthy, godly, and sanctified men; the thoughtful utterances of highly enlightened believers. And yet, having said all this, they are after all only fallible; they may contain ninety per cent of truth, well expressed and accurately defined; but the possibility remains that the other ten per cent is

full of errors and mistakes Even tho there be one or more infallible epistles, how can this avail us, since we do not know it? In fact, we are without the least certainty in this matter. And for this reason it is actually conceded that the apostles have made mistakes.

Hence the Reformed churches can not accept this fascinating representation; and the conscience of believers will always protest against it. What we expect in "*holy apostles*" is this very *certainty, reliability, and decision*. Reading their testimony, we want to rely upon it. This certainty alone has been the strength of the Church of all ages. This conviction alone has given her rest. And the Church of to-day feels as instinctively that the reliability of the Word that is its *Bible* is being taken away from it, inasmuch as, these beautifully sounding theories strip the apostolic word of its infallibility.

The holy apostles appear in their writings as such, and not otherwise. St. John, the most beloved among the twelve, testifies that the Lord Jesus gave them as apostles a rare promise, saying, "He shall guide you into all truth," ([John xvi. 13](#)) a word that may not be applied to others, but to the apostles exclusively. And again: "The Comforter which is the Holy Ghost shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things whatsoever I have said unto you." ([John xiv. 26](#)); which promise was not intended for all, but for the apostles only, securing them a gift evidently distinct from illumination. In fact, this promise was nothing else than the permanent endowment with the gift received only temporarily when they went forth on their first mission among Israel: "For it is, not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." ([Matt. x. 20](#))

Moreover, the Lord Jesus did not only promise them that the word proceeding from their mouth would be a word of the Holy Spirit, but He granted them such personal power and authority that it would be as tho God Himself spoke through them. St. Paul testified of this to the church of Thessalonica, saying: "For this cause we thank God that ye received it not as the word of men, but, *as it is in truth*, the Word of God" ([1 Thess. ii. 13](#)). And St. John tells us that, both before and after the resurrection, the Lord Jesus gave His disciples power to bind on earth in the sense that their word would have binding power forever: "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained"; — ([John xx. 23](#)) words that are horrible and untenable except they be understood as implying perfect agreement between the minds of the apostles and the mind of God. Of similar import are the words of Christ to Peter: "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." ([Matt. xvi. 19](#))

However, reading and pondering these remarkable and weighty words, let us be careful not to fall into the error of Rome, or, in order to escape from this, make the Word of God of no effect, which is equally dangerous. For the Church of Rome applies these words of Jesus to His disciples, to the whole Church as an institution; especially the word to Peter, making it to refer to all Peter's successors (so-called) in the government of the Church of



Rome. If that be indeed the meaning of these words, then Rome is perfectly right; then to the Pope is granted power to bind, and the priests of Rome have still the power to absolve. Our reason for denying that Rome has this power is not the impossibility for men to have it, for it was given to the apostles; Peter was infallible in his sentences *ex cathedra*, and the apostles could grant absolution. But we deny that Rome has the slightest authority to confer this power of Peter upon the Pope, or that of the apostles upon its priests. Neither [Matt. xvi. 19](#) nor [John xx. 23](#) contains the least proof for such claim. And inasmuch as no man has the liberty to exercise such extraordinary power except he can show the credential's of his mission, so we deny Rome's qualifications to exercise it in pope or priest, not because this is impossible, but because Rome can not substantiate its claims.

At the same time, let us, in our contending with Rome, not fall into the opposite error of disparaging the plain and clear meaning of the word. This is done by the Ethical theologians; for the words of Jesus referred to do not receive justice so long as we refuse to recognize in the apostles a working of the Holy Spirit entirely peculiar, unique, and extraordinary. We dilute the words of Jesus and violate their sense so long as we do not acknowledge that, if the apostles were still living, they would have the power to forgive us our sins; and that Peter, if he were still living, would have power and authority to issue ordinances binding upon the whole Church. The words are so plain, the qualification was granted in such definite terms, that it can not be denied that John could forgive sin, and that Peter had power to issue an infallible decree. The Lord said to the disciples: "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them" ([John xx. 23](#)); and to Peter: "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven." ([Matt. xvi. 19](#))

Thus acknowledging the unique position and extraordinary power of the apostles, we immediately add that this power was granted to them alone and to no one else.

We emphasize this in opposition to Rome and to those who apply the words of Christ, spoken to His disciples exclusively, to ministers and other believers. Neither Rome nor the Ethical theologians have the right to do this, unless they can show that the Lord Jesus gave them such right. But they never can. Care should be taken, therefore, in the choice of texts, proofs, and quotations from the Scripture, to ascertain not only *what* is said, but also *to whom* it was said. And thus the error concerning the apostolate will soon be overcome; and believers will see that the apostles occupy a different position from other Christians, that the promises quoted bear an exceptional character, and that the Word of the Lord is misunderstood when inspiration is confounded with illumination.

In opposition to these wrong views, which are Romish, clerical in principle, and at the same time strongly tending to rationalism, we maintain the ancient confession of the Christian Church, which declares that, as the ambassadors extraordinary of Christ, the apostles occupied a unique position in the race, in the Church, and in the history of the

world, and were clothed with extraordinary powers that required an extraordinary operation of the Holy Spirit.

But we do not deny that these men were born again and partakers of the heavenly illumination; so that the man of sin was driven back, and the new man was powerfully revealed in them. But their personal state and condition was the cause of their continued sinfulness until the hour of their death; hence their infallible authority could never spring from the fallible condition of their hearts. Even tho they had been less sinful, such power could not be thus accounted for. And if they had fallen more deeply into sin, it would not have hindered the Holy Spirit's operation with reference to the exercise of this authority. It is remarkable that Peter, who was clothed with the highest power, fell again and again into great sin. They were *saints* because they were hid in Christ like other Christians; but they were *holy apostles* not on the ground of their spiritual state and condition, but only by virtue of their holy calling and the working of the Holy Spirit that was promised and given unto them.

Finally, the question arises, whether there was a difference between the operation of the Holy Spirit in the prophets and in the apostles. We answer in the affirmative. Ezekiel's oracles are different from St. John's Gospel. The Epistle to the Romans bears witness to a different inspiration from that of the prophecies of Zacharias. Undoubtedly the book of Revelation proves that the apostles were also susceptible to inspiration by visions; the book of the Acts is evidence that in those days there were also wonderful signs; and St. Paul speaks of visions and ecstasies. And yet the collective treasure that came down to us under the apostles' name bears evidence that the inspiration of the New Testament has another character than that of the Old. And the principal difference consists in the mighty fact of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The prophets were inspired before Pentecost, and the apostles after it. This fact is so strongly marked in the history of their mission that before it the apostles sit still, while immediately after it they appear in their apostolic character before the world. And since in the outpouring the Holy Spirit came to dwell in the body of Christ, which before He had been preparing, it is obvious that the difference of inspiration in the Old and the New Testament consists in the fact that the former was wrought upon the prophets from *without*, while the latter wrought upon the apostles from *within*, proceeding from the body of Christ.

And this is the reason that the prophets give us more or less the impression of an inspiration independent of their personal, spiritual life, while the inspiration of the apostles acts almost always through the life of the soul. It is this very fact that offers to the error of the Ethical view its starting-point. Surely the person and his condition appear in the apostles much more in the foreground than in the prophets. And yet in both prophet and apostle inspiration is that wholly extraordinary operation of the Holy Spirit whereby, in a manner for us incomprehensible and to them not always conscious, they were kept from the possibility of error.

XXXII.

Apostles To-Day?

"Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are ye not my work in the Lord?"—1 *Cor. ix. 1.*

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We may not take leave of the apostolate without a last look at the circle of its members. It is a *closed* circle; and every effort to reopen it tends to efface a characteristic of the New Covenant.

And yet the effort is being made again and again. We see it in Rome's apostolic succession; in the Ethical view gradually effacing the boundary-line between the apostles and believers; and in its boldest and most concrete form among the Irvingites.⁸

The latter assert not only that the Lord gave to His Church a college of apostles in the beginning, but that He has now called a body of apostles in His Church to prepare His people for the coming.

However, this position can not be very successfully supported. Neither in the discourses of Christ, nor in the epistles of the apostles, nor in the Apocalypse, do we find the least intimation of such an event. The end of all things is repeatedly spoken of. The New Testament frequently rehearses the events and signs that must precede the Lord's return. They are recorded so minutely that some even say that the exact date can be fixed. And yet, among all these prophecies, we fail to discover the slightest sign of a subsequent apostolate. In the panorama of the things to come there is literally no room for it.

Nor have the results realized the expectations of these brethren. Their apostolate has been a great disappointment. It has accomplished almost nothing. It has come and gone without leaving a trace. We do not deny that some of these men have done wonderful things; but be it noticed, in the first place, that the signs wrought were far below those performed by the apostles; second, that a man like Pastor Blumhardt has also wrought signs that greatly deserve to be noticed; third, that the Roman Catholic Church sometimes offers signs that are not pretended nor artificial; lastly, that the Lord has warned us in His Word that signs shall be wrought by men who are not His own.

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Moreover, let us not forget that the apostles of the Irvingites completely lack the marks of the apostolate. These were: (1) a call directly from the King of the Church; (2) a peculiar qualification of the Holy Spirit making them infallible in the service of the Church. These men lack both marks. They tell us, indeed, of a call come to them by the mouth of prophets, but this is to little or no purpose, for a call from a prophet is not equal to one directly from Christ, and again the name "prophet" is exceedingly misleading. The word prophet has, on the sacred page, a wide application, and occurs in both a *limited* and a *general* sense. The

8 The Irvingites are known in England and America as the Catholic Apostolic Church.—Trans.