

## Beacons of the Bible

### The Spirit Striving in Vain

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"My Spirit shall not always strive with man." Genesis 6:3

Frightful was the havoc wrought by sin's entrance! Its scythe laid low all inward godliness. Its poison tainted the whole man. Evil seized the rudder of the vessel, and steered it far from God. Vile passions took the sway. Earth became a dark downward road to hell.

But still the devil was not thoroughly triumphant. Some power was soon found to counteract. Barriers beat back the flood of wickedness. The sweeping hurricane was restrained. The world was not unchecked rebellion.

Some captives were wholly rescued from the tyrant's grasp. Some souls burst from the tomb. They put off the grave-clothes. They went forth new beings with new life. In surrounding darkness, Abel had sight to see redemption's path. Amid a stumbling crowd, Enoch had strength to walk with God. In other cases, evil was checked--but not subdued--enmity was shackled--but not removed--conscience was roused--but not enlightened--convictions troubled--but no conversions followed.

This counteracting agent was God the Holy Spirit. From the beginning He worked mightily. Creation's morn witnessed His going forth. When earth was formless--void--dark--an unsightly chaos--a shapeless mass, "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Genesis 1:2. Then lovely order smiled, and robes of beauty decked this lower world.

"By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth." Psalm 33:6. "By His Spirit He has garnished the heavens." Job 26:13. The skies obeyed His bidding, and sparkled with its canopy of orbs.

But these material wonders are but faint shadows of His inward power. *The soul is the theater of His grand exploits.* Here he sows seed for harvests infinite--eternal. But His interior dealings are wrapped in deepest mystery. The modes of acting differ. "The wind blows where it wills." John 3:8. Sometimes it rushes with the storm's furious force. Sometimes it sighs softly, as a summer breeze. Dissimilar, also, are the results. There are His special conquests. There are His

common calls. Some men are His glorious trophies, Others are beacons warning not to resist His love.

These diverse cases claim our notice. Holy Spirit, come, now reveal Yourself!

There are the heirs of life. God in eternal counsels marked them as His own. The Son received them, as His bride--His body--His portion--His jewels--His delight. The Spirit knows them well. In right time, and in best way, He works His wonders in them. He finds them indeed, like other men, steeped in corruption--molded in evil--alien from God--blind in understanding--hardened in heart--Satan's willing slaves--wanderers in destruction's road--journeying without thought towards sin's last home. By heavenly rays He dissipates their darkness. He gives them eyes to see the beauty--the extent--the glory of the wondrous law. He reveals God and His attributes--God and His just demands. He implants the sense of terrible transgression. The sinner trembles and is full of shame. He feels, that countless sins doom him to eternal wrath. Then wholesome thoughts bud forth, Ah! where can I fly? Is there no refuge? Am I forever lost? Must I reap endlessly the dread fruits of my earthly course? Is hell my hopeless home?

Happy the day, which witnesses these inward throes! Nature never sows such seed. Their origin is always one. They are from heaven. They are inwrought by the Spirit's power.

But when the Spirit thus slays *pride*, and chases *ignorance* away, and leads into the valley of deep *humiliation*, the way is opened for reviving visits. He raises from this miry clay. He uplifts to a solid rock. He shows God's purpose of redemption. He tells the story of love, and grace, and mercy. Christ is revealed, ready to undertake the rescue--powerful to achieve it. The coming to our earth in human nature--the cup of suffering emptied to its dregs--the blood, and all its cleansing power--the cross, and all its expiating virtue--the death, and all its ransoming effects--the sin-bearer, and His surety--agony--the curse-remover, and His liberating pains--the law-fulfiller, and the transfer of His righteousness--pass in review before adoring gaze. The contrite sinner looks--wonders--believes. He sees Christ--all mighty to save--all willingness to welcome. Subdued--melted--attracted--he ventures near, and nearer yet. He stops not, until he falls into salvation's arms. He sits down under Christ's shadow with great delight. He is persuaded, that sins are remitted--pardon conferred--God reconciled--heaven secured. Happy, glorious work! It is the Spirit's doing. He effects it in full accordance with eternal counsels.

He, who this begins, carries on the spiritual building to the glorious top-stone. He constantly makes fuller--larger--richer--more glowing, more enchanting revelations of the Lord. The soul gazes more intently. And as it gazes, it joys the more, and loves the more, and brightens into divine resemblance. The mind is changed into the mind of Christ. The new man is put on, "which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Eph. 4:24.

Thus as the title-deeds to heaven are more clearly read and more devoutly prized, fitness for it ripens. The Spirit's daily visits daily elevate the walk. He is a guest mighty to warn--to teach--to guide--to cleanse--to purify--to sanctify--to cheer--to bless. In loving arms he safely bears the happy saint above the billows of earth's stormy voyage. He guards him from the tempter's wily snares. At last He lands him in the haven of pure peace--the home of many mansions--the blessed Paradise of the saved. He gloriously prevails. He goes on conquering, until crowns of life encircle the Christian warrior's head. Thus every saved soul shines forever a monument of calling--enabling--sanctifying grace. They, who enter heaven, are born again by the Spirit's renovating power, and brought to Jesus by His conquering arm. He mightily commences, prosecutes, and ends the work. Omnipotence ceases not its marvels, until victory tramples down each foe. Every pilgrim saint on earth, and every glorified saint above, is evidence of these sovereign triumphs. Hallelujah to the Father! Hallelujah to the Son! Hallelujah to the Holy Spirit!

But all are not thus graciously subdued. Earth is thronged by multitudes, strangers to Jesus--never fleeing to His cross--never sprinkled with His blood. Hardened they live. Hardened they die. Is it then true, that the Spirit never knocks at their hearts' door? Have, they no outward warning and no inward check? Are there no gleams from above, ending only in darker darkness, and more aggravated woe?

Let it be repeated, that this mystery is deep. But Scripture is not silent here. And Scripture's voice is always echoed by experience. The word is full of teaching. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." It is a fact, then, that He sometimes strives for a while, and ceases. He approaches, and withdraws. He comes again. Admission is denied. Visits become more rare, and then are discontinued. The knocks unanswered, faintly return, and ultimately die away. Inward stillness is no more disturbed. The soul sleeps on, and dreams into perdition.

It was so with the ungodly of the old world. The Spirit is the same in ages past, present, and to come. He strove not always in those wretched days. He strives not always now.

But still he strove before the flood. What was His mode of dealing? Annals are brief. But yet they give some glimpses. He gave loud testimony. He sent forth the thrilling note of truth. He raised up preachers to warn and call. There was *Enoch*. His trumpet gave no doubtful sound. With words clear as the very light, and dreadful as the thunder's roar, he told of coming judgment--and earth's final scene--and vengeance to the uttermost.

There was *Noah*. He stands on a high pedestal, as a "Preacher of Righteousness." His theme then would unfold our gracious God--glorious in justice--holy in His claims--and yet providing a covering for the sinner--a garment

fit for heaven. Through many years he waved on high the Gospel-torch. In all these warnings and displays of saving love the Spirit put forth energy. Who can tell, what frequent terrors shook the hearers! How often the breast sighed--the heart quaked--the tears streamed; how again and again sin was seen as the worst foe, and vows were formed to leave it. But the emotions were evanescent. The preacher ceased, and with his voice conscience resumed its stupor. The old allurements came. The Spirit was no more heeded. Impressions were obliterated. They were as words written on the sand. The coming tide effaced the whole. At last the heart became a very rock. Wave upon wave might now pass over it, wind after wind might now beat on it. But it continued rock. The Spirit ceased to strive. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man."

This appalling truth was thus appallingly exemplified. Reader! contemplate the fact. The mirror may reflect your state. Dealings with your spirit are patent only to yourself. Your heart is hidden from your neighbor's view. No other eye can read these solemn secrets. But you may be conscious, that frequently a voice has spoken in the inner chamber of your thoughts. You may well know, that an unseen hand has sometimes touched you.

Perhaps in the SANCTUARY, when men of God have deeply probed your troubled mind--and told of sin's sure end--of judgment near--of hell beyond--of flames, which never die--of worms, which ever gnaw--in terror you have resolved, that wrath's tremendous thunderbolts should never fall on you. But the fear lasted not. As the early dew it passed away. You still are what you have long been. You cannot forget the inward struggle. It may return no more. "My Spirit shall not always strive."

Perhaps when from the pulpit-throne JESUS has been most lovingly displayed--when in persuasive testimony He seemed to come a very suppliant to your heart's door--when all His grace, and gentleness, and love, beamed beauteously before your eyes--then meltings within have moved, and your soul has spread its wings to fly with rapture to His ready arms. But you delayed. The hardening world again surrounded you with entangling chains. The warmth expired. You fell back into deadness. An attracting Savior receded from your view. Your dim eyes closed on salvation's glory. Will they see the luster of that light again? "My Spirit shall not always strive."

There may have been times, when thundering PROVIDENCE shook, as with earthquake-shock, the caverns of your slumbering soul. Some vast catastrophe, sweeping with relentless swoop multitudes into the unseen world--some desolating malady, stalking with death's scythe through the affrighted land--some sudden stroke, felling in life's prime a relative or friend--some strong disease, seizing with iron grasp your tottering frame--some loss of property, bringing chill poverty to sit beside you--some blighted scheme, presenting you with disappointment's cup--some cruel slander, casting foul blight upon the fairness of your name; these, or the like calamities, may have revealed the world's deceptive

emptiness. Awakening from sleep, you have resolved to rise above such fleeting scene. Weary of vanities--alive to peril--your thoughts have turned to lasting joys and safety in the only Savior. You are conscious that the call was loud--was heard--was almost obeyed. But you paused. Earth's arts again put forth their witcheries. You are as far from Christ as ever. Will like visitations visit you again? "My Spirit shall not always strive."

Perhaps your eye rested on some BIBLE-WORD, or pursuing texts haunted your ear. Extraordinary light shone round you. Truth spoke in new and most convincing force. Time seemed to vanish. Eternity stared you in the face. Gigantic realities appeared gigantically real. You felt the duty and the wisdom of immediate change. But before you turned, some snare entrapped you. You are still unchanged. Will your Bible thus speak again? "My Spirit shall not always strive."

Perhaps some FRIEND in pious earnestness grasped your hand, and reasoned, and implored. You confessed, "My course is wrong--I have no present peace--I dread the future; I hear of Jesus and joy and peace in Him. I will arise and seek Him." But no. You loitered in the world's foul ground. The opportunity was lost. No one seems now to care for you. Will friendly calls again call you? "My Spirit shall not always strive."

Reader! do you in these sad lines discern your very picture? Does conscience herein perceive a pathway trodden by your hardening soul? Then listen to a solemn note. It may be another and a conquering visit from the Spirit.

It would be murderous cruelty to conceal, that you are tottering on destruction's brink. You see there is a period in the downward course, when warnings warn no more. The word, now ringing in your ears, proclaims, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man."

You have heard, also, of a "reprobate mind." This is no unmeaning sound--no shadow of an unreal form--no figment of imaginary woe--no term invented to give groundless terror. It is a sad description of a sadder state. It is the deathful blight of the out-poured curse. It is the midnight darkness of a soul drifted to realms uncheered by any Gospel-ray. Tremble, awake.

There is, also, a decree, which locks up in hopelessness--which paralyzes all the means of grace--which freezes all the streams of feeling--which chokes all the avenues of impression--which rivets the chains of Satan. God from His high throne may pronounce, "Let him alone." "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." Hos. 4:17.

Then the final curtain falls. Judicial deafness supervenes. The hardness cannot melt.

Analyze the dread decree. It blocks up all the channels, through which saving mercy flows. "Let him alone," my MINISTERS. When you set forth the Savior's love--and all the glories of His finished work--and all the pardon purchased by His blood--and all the peace of faith--and all the happiness of heaven--"let him alone." Let all be dark before his eyes. Let no sound pierce the deep grave of his soul. Hearing, let him not hear.

"Let him alone," my BIBLE. When his eye rests on brightest texts, inviting to the cross--warning of hell--depicting the eternal world--showing the ransomed with their harps of gold--unfolding the realms of agony--let the page be a vacant blank. Let every word be as a skeleton, breathing no life. "Let him alone."

"Let him alone," my PROVIDENCES. If the whole universe were convulsed with earthquakes--hurricanes--appalling terrors--desolating plagues, let him look on unmoved. Let him stand hardened by the open grave. Let him be hardened on the bed of pain. Let things most adverse, things most prosperous, be alike to him. Among them all, let his rocky heart become more adamant. "Let him alone."

"Let him alone," my SON. You are all love--all grace--all mercy. But love must not love him. Grace must not look savingly of him. Mercy must not yearn tenderly over him. Your blood must not cleanse him. Your cross is not for him a shelter. Your righteousness is not his robe. You have knocked often at his heart. Knock no more. "Let him alone."

"Let him alone," my SPIRIT. It is your property to bestow grace. It is your province to convince of sin. It is your prerogative to reveal Jesus. It is your glorious office to minister salvation. But leave him graceless. Break not his fetters. Give no sight of Jesus. You have striven often. Strive no more. "Let him alone."

Reader! what a Beacon you have here! Do you tremble? Then the decree has not imprisoned you up in condemnation. Be wise, and never trifle more. Heed every whisper of the Spirit. When He warns, turn! When He teaches, drink deeply of the lesson. When He calls, hasten with all speed. Quench not the first spark of His light. Never neglect His gentlest voice. Never resist His mildest drawing. Watch Him with intent gaze. Follow Him with instant step. Yield to Him in full obedience. He leads from sin--from self--to Jesus and to heaven.

Holy Spirit! seal for glory all readers of this warning!

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