

SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION
Dallas, Texas
May 11, 1894

Sermon preached before the Southern Baptist Convention, Dallas, Texas,
May 11, 1894, by Dr. F. H. Kerfoot, of Kentucky.

Text: "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away,
the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart, I will send
him unto you" (John 16:7).

The time of Saviour's visible presence on earth was hereby finished. His disciples had been given to understand that he was soon to leave them. He had been engaged in speaking words that were intended to prepare them for his leaving and to comfort them after he was gone. Among these words none were more important than the words of my text. In them he reiterates the promise that he will not leave them orphaned. He promises to send another who will come and take his place and abide with them and be to them all that he had been. But the meaning of this language has not been nearly exhausted when we find in it a promise to his immediate disciples. It is a promise to all Christians of all times. It is one of those significant and pregnant promises that means more than appears on the surface--one of those promises that has justified the feeling that there is far more for them to God's word than they have ever realized; that, as one has said, there is ever new light to break forth from God's word as the ages roll. It is not at all likely that the disciples of Jesus understood that promise when it was made or had any conception of its value. It took the day of Pentecost to make them understand and appreciate it. And it is to be feared that Christian people from that time have never risen to anything like a true understanding. ~~A~~ profound conviction that there is more in these

words than we ever gotten from them and a conviction that there is nothing in God's word more important to Christ's struggling people makes me feel that I can render no better service on this occasion than to come to you with this promise of Jesus to send the Comforter. Let me say that I have no disposition to take up at this time and discuss the Bible doctrine of the Comforter. I trust that what I say will induce many of you to give to this doctrine a more careful study.

I. The promise interpreted--First of all I desire fairly to interpret the promise. What is it that Jesus really promised?

1. Who is the comforter? Clearly the Holy Spirit.
2. In what sense called the Comforter?
3. (1) The word comforter
- (2) Better understood by adding the word another.

3. But what can he mean by promising to send a Holy Spirit?

He had already come. He can only mean that he will send him in some sense that he had not already come. In a sense that he had never been known before. It was necessary for Christ to come to do this work first. He must needs go through Gethsemane and Calvary and cry, "It is finished;" be raised up. The watchman cry, "Lift up your heads, Oh, ye gates," etc. Then the Spirit could come as never before--so come as to make men date his coming from then as if from the first.

I desire in the second place to follow my text also and call your attention to the full value of this promise. Fortunately we are not left to our own estimate. Jesus himself has set a value. He says the coming of the Spirit will be of more value than his presence. One little glimpse in that walk to Emmaus. That he had hoped. Oh, the depth of bitterness and despair? Did you ever have a great hope to die? Some one who was all the world to you? Some one you had come

to depend upon, look up go, in whom great hopes had centered?

Then to see that one dead; gone away from you? Feel that longing for a voice that was hushed, for a hand that was vanished? Sitting as in poverty and desolation and despair, the world like a vast desert, and you, oh, so dreary? Such was to be the case of these disciples with Jesus gone from them. Such a prospect when he talked of leaving them. The bare mention of it had filled them with sorrow. The realization filled them with despair. "We had hoped" was fully known and appreciated by Jesus himself. The shepherd knew better than the sheep. The sheep huddled in dark night, storm, coming wolves. The sheep have a vague dread, they tremble. And the shepherd knows far better. So Jesus. Yet, he says: "It is expedient in wonderful that which Jesus here puts upon this promise."

But he goes further. He lets them know better still what this would be worth by telling them what the Spirit would do for them and be to them when he comes. Moreover, he should guide them into all the truth, enabling them to write the infallible word of God the impregnable rock of holiness. He should take that word and make it effective in the hearts of saints and sinners. He should call men to preach it and make their preaching quick and powerful. He would gather the scattered ones into churches and give to the forces of our earth all the accumulated power of concentration and organization and social relationships, and above all be present himself. God with us to will and to do of his own good pleasure. In a word, he should take up his work where ^{he} had left it, be to his people all that he could be, and then if he could be present, take charge of the work and carry it on as heaven's executive, making us feel and the world know that of a truth God is on earth in eternal presence and almighty power as truly as was the case when he

himself was with the people in visible person.

This, brethren, is the interpretation of my text and at least a partial estimate of its significance and value to his people. Now will you bear with me while, in conclusion I call your attention to one or two points which I think are fairly connected with the text, and with what I have already said? The first of these points is that the estimate which we have put upon the value of this promise has been fully justified by experience with them. Truly, it does look now as if it were better for him to have gone that the Comforter might come.

So, too, brethren, the book of Acts is one continual illustration of this fact. Everywhere it is said they were filled with the Spirit. And everywhere the gospel of Christ goes conquering by the Spirit's power. The same is true ever since and is true now, if only we could open our hearts to the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Christian church has been slow to take these promises, as slow to believe in the Holy Spirit as Christ's disciples were in him. But once in a while there has been a Wesley or Whitfield, a Spurgeon or Moody or Miller, a Clough, and what hath not God wrought by such men? So, too, as under Jonathan Edwards there has come mighty convictions until men have caught hold of the very pillars of the house in a wild hope to keep their feet from slipping down to hell. Verily the arm of God is not short now any more than when Jesus was on earth. The power of God is with us. All things are possible unto God.

One other point and I close. It is the practical application of all this to ourselves. Is all this that I have said true? Then why don't we pay more attention to the Holy Spirit and have more of his power resting upon us? Many of sing, "Lord, how we grovel here below." Some

of us call for organization. I don't believe the trouble is this. God is a great organizer. He organized every blade of grass. What we need is that every individual be filled with the Holy Spirit. "Not by might, nor power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." Come, oh, breath of God; breathe upon the dry bones; make us soldiers. Come, oh, Spirit of God; thy mighty arm make bare. Fill us with thy light and thy power. Shine on us and through us. Help us in our Convention. Enable us to take hold of this world and shake it with the power of God. Enable us to make men feel the power of unseen things. Come, oh, Spirit of God, comfort thy people; convict the world; conquer Satan; crown Jesus King of kings and Lord of lords.

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