John 7:39 (GWG) 150027

Dr. M'Neille on John 7:39, John 7:39, Dr. M'Neille on: Part 1 (7:39)

Sir, I have long thought that the doctrine which denies to the saints of God, since our Lord's death and resurrection, any special blessing beyond what was previously enjoyed, is not only untenable in itself, but also mischievous in its tendency.

Of all the attempts which have been made to uphold this error, I have met with none so preposterous as that of the well-known Canon of Chester, Dr. M'Neile, at a recent and numerous clerical meeting in Lancashire. The Dr. delivered an address with the purpose of reconciling Psa. 51:11, " Take not thy Holy Spirit from me," with John 7:39, " The Holy Ghost was not yet [given]." This he endeavored to effect by assigning to the latter passage the meaning that, " during the incarnation of Christ, the Spirit was imparted to Him exclusively. This would account for the promise He gave to His disciples that the Spirit should be bestowed on them when He departed, and for the advantage He said they would receive in consequence of His leaving them. Thus, as it appeared to him, it was that 'the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." Dr. M'N had before stated his disagreement with the interpretations. " The Holy Ghost was not yet working," "the Holy Ghost was not yet endowed with His miraculous powers," " the Holy Ghost in His sanctifying influences was not yet given." Here we agree with him; for these notions are vain and groundless. If he had said that the Holy Ghost had personally come to dwell in Christ, as He had never done in man before, and that on Christ's departure, He had been in like manner poured out upon believers at and since Pentecost, we must also agree. But his view seems to be that, whereas the Holy Ghost had been given to men under the Old Testament, He was not so given during the life of our Lord. "During the incarnation of Christ the Spirit was imparted to Him exclusively."

In other words, the Canon evidently believes the Holy Ghost to have been no longer given to men during the time that the Lord was here below. Hence it follows that what David so earnestly deprecates as a chastening for his sin, viz., the removal from hint of the Holy Spirit, became the universal condition of men when the Son of God was born in this world! According to his scheme, that blessed event must have proved, instead of a source of increased light and joy, the occasion of the greatest spiritual darkness and sorrow. The deluge itself, on this absurd view, had not been such a calamity to mankind.

How different is the picture drawn by our Lord Himself of the then position of His disciples. " Blessed," He says, " are the eyes which see the things that ye see. For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." (Luke 10:23-24.) Surely it will not be said that it was to mere outward seeing and hearing that the Lord attached this blessedness. This He elsewhere otherwise describes and contrasts with the intelligent apprehension of the disciples, " because they seeing, see not, and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear."

It was clearly a superiority of real soul-blessedness, as well as of outward privilege, which the Lord spoke of. But could this be the portion of the disciples, if the Holy Spirit, imparted before Christ's coining, had been absorbed into His sole person? For the mere presence of Christ with them, without the action of the Holy Spirit, would, indeed, have been a decrease rather than an accession of spiritual blessing.

Does Dr. M'Neile believe that the disciples (Judas of course excepted) were really children of God Does he deny that those who then believed in Him were born of God—born of water and of the Spirit'? Does he mean that the " good tidings of great joy " were to consist in the total absence of the Spirit's gracious dealing with the souls of men? If this be not his thought, it appears to me that this argument is null and his statement without meaning; if it be, the case is yet worse.

The fact is, as Scripture makes plain, God had from the beginning of the world been converting souls to Himself through the faith of the Savior. Assuredly the epoch of our Lord's life and ministry was no exception. Of this the gospels furnish abundant proofs, which undeniably could only be accounted for by the effectual operation of the Holy Ghost. Spiritual regeneration is a truth common to all dispensations. There may be a greater ingatheriug at one time than another, but at no period can this be save by the Spirit, who quickens souls through the word of God that reveals Christ to them. Is it really conceived by the Canon of Chester that all this was suspended during the lifetime of the Lord Jesus, (save the exclusive indwelling of the Spirit in Him,) only to recommence with men after His departure! Wherever does this gentleman find such serious difficulty? And why does he gravely propound such a distressing idea? It is because he denies the peculiar standing of the saints since Pentecost! Hence his violent effort to escape the plaint statement, that the Holy Ghost was not yet given (i.e., in the blessed and unprecedented way which followed our Lord's ascension.) " But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." In other words, that (in addition to the everlasting life which, as believing on Him, they already possessed through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit,) the disciples should, in consequence of His death and glorification, receive the Holy Ghost in a new and special manner; or rather, I would say, receive riot His gifts or effects only, but, for the first time, Himself. They were already born again of Him, even as the saints had been in Old Testament times; NOW they should, besides, receive not merely life more abundantly in Christ risen, but the personal presence of the Spirit sent down from heaven to be in and with them. This same truth is presented often and in various forms throughout the Epistles, and very clearly in John 14; 15, and 16.

Thus it was expedient that Christ should go away. It was an immense privilege over and above what the disciples had enjoyed during Christ's life, and still more above what any saint had possessed before Christ.

G. W. G.

To the Editor of the Bible Treasury.

P.S.—To many readers of the Bible Treasury it will be a new and strange thing to hear that Dr. M'N., in a work published some years ago, under the title of " The Church and the Churches," sought to turn aside the force of Matt. 11:11, by applying the "least in the kingdom of heaven" to Christ! He, evidently not knowing that the greater part of the New Testament could be cited to the same end, supposed that this was the main foundation for the claim of peculiar privileges for the present dispensation, and therefore set himself with extraordinary zeal to destroy the stronghold, as he thought, of that error. For it is plain enough that, interpreted according to its obvious meaning, this scripture predicates a higher place of the least Christian than God was pleased to give John the Baptist, i.e., the highest under the old economy and up to the eve of the new dispensation. But, such a thought being assumed to be false, some other turn must be given to the passage. Is it not solemn to see how tradition habitually nullifies, as far as it can, the word of God.? and, what is worse, to see how error persevered in, notwithstanding adequate light, ever tends to lower the glory of Christ? The truth is, that the kingdom of heaven was not set up till Christ went to heaven, and therefore cannot refer to His humiliation. Further, it would be more true to say, considering who it was, that the kingdom was in Him, than that He was in the kingdom. But to make Christ the " least in the kingdom " is at once foolish and irreverent; and the end (viz., the denial of the special blessedness of the saints since Pentecost) is only less evil than the means. It is not surprising that he who misunderstood the " one body" then, should now be in like error as to the " one Spirit."

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