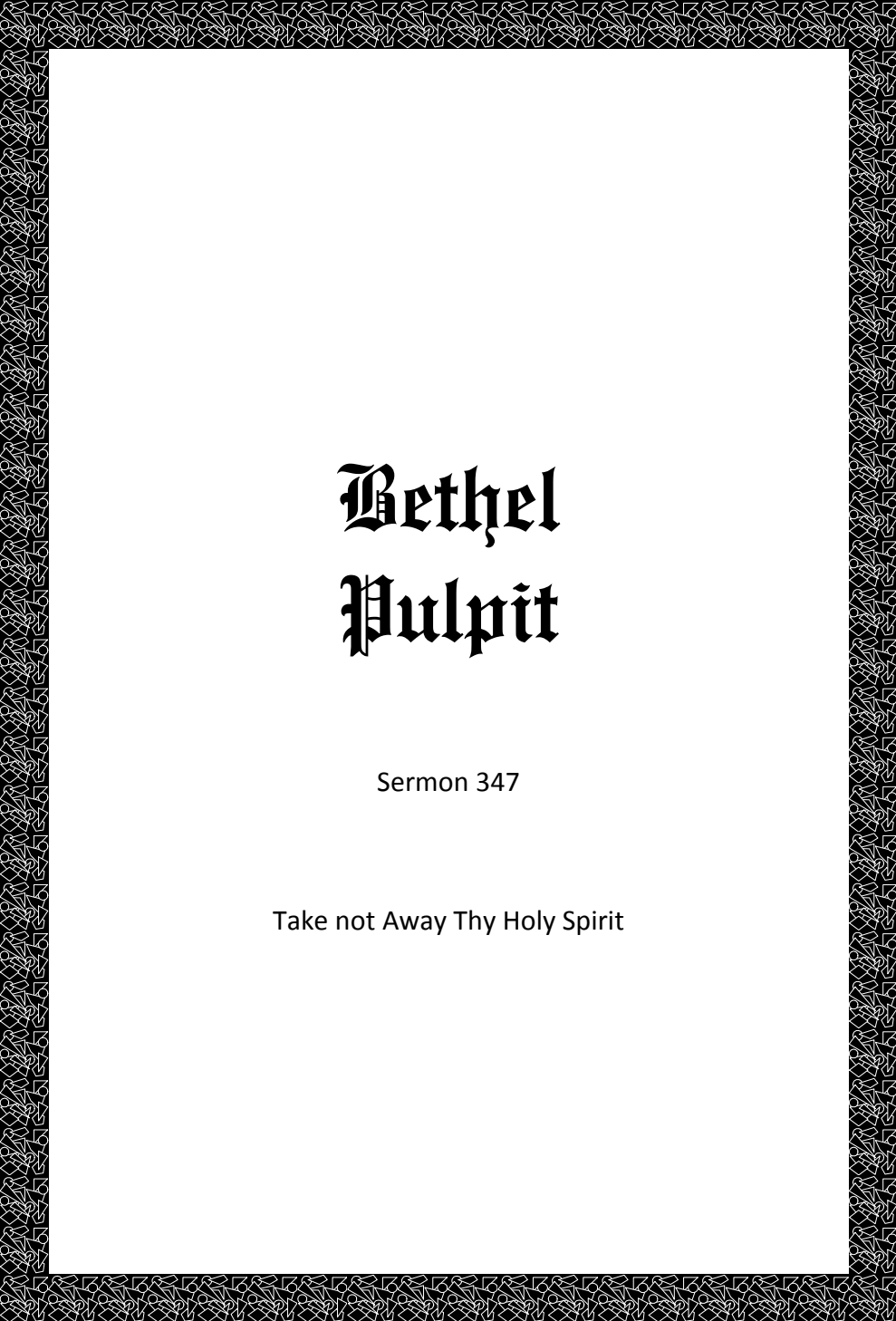




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 347

Take not Away Thy Holy Spirit

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 8th June, 2014**

Text: *"Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me" (Psalm 51. 11).*

Today is the Day of Pentecost when we remember the wonderful coming of the Holy Spirit in power. Now I must say that this verse was laid upon my spirit to speak from this evening, and I did not realise till afterwards, after I had been meditating on it, that today was the Day of Pentecost. Some of you younger one will not remember the time when the Spring Holiday was not fixed. It was always kept on what was known as Whitsun, and the Day of Pentecost changed like Easter Sunday from year to year. In many ways it is a sad thing we seem to have lost that, because in former days it was usually accepted that the minister would speak to the occasion on Whit Sunday, as he did on Christmas Day or as he did on Easter Sunday. And then there were the Whit Monday services and usually a minister would speak something to do with the Person and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Well, this is a vital subject, so I read to you that wonderful chapter this evening concerning the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). I would remind you of one or two foundation truths. The Holy Spirit is a Person – not just an influence, a Person. The Holy Spirit is a divine Person, the third Person in the Godhead, one with the Father and with the Son. And never think that the Holy Spirit did not exist before the Day of Pentecost, any more than we do not think that the Lord Jesus did not exist before His birth at Bethlehem. The Holy Spirit was from everlasting, and we read here and there of His gracious Person and work in the Old Testament, though those things were not so clearly revealed as they were after the Day of Pentecost. But in creation we are told that the Spirit moved. We have David after his sin bemoaning the way he has sinned against the Holy Spirit. In a few places in the prophets we have the Holy Spirit and His work. We perhaps think especially of Ezekiel's vision, the dry bones and the winds blowing upon those bones that they might live, signifying the life-giving, vital, important work of the Holy Spirit.

O but what a demonstration there was of the Holy Spirit's work in almighty power on the Day of Pentecost! There never was such a day –

three thousand people savingly converted – the work of the Holy Spirit. And really if you think of it from the point of human reason, as you read through Peter’s sermon, you perhaps think there was not anything special in it. It was simple; there were not any very clever arguments; it did not seem too eloquent. But the power with which God used it! O the wonderful power that attended Peter’s preaching on the Day of Pentecost! And that is what it ever has been: it is the power of the Holy Spirit that makes the difference.

I was always grateful that when I went out to preach as a young man, in the little chapel at Manchester there were a number of very old people, some in their nineties, and they told me they were in the congregation of the famous A.B. Taylor. When you think of it, he had two hundred or two hundred and fifty baptized church members. When you think of it, he had a regular congregation of nearly a thousand. One most godly old lady said, “I want you always to remember one thing.” She said, “Mr. Taylor did not preach any different or any better than you present-day preachers. O but,” she said, “it was the power of the Holy Spirit, the effect of it, the power in the hearts of the people.” And beloved friends, that is the sad difference between today and that former generation. May we know more of that simple truth: “In power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.”

But apart from the power with which the Holy Spirit attended the preaching of the Word on the Day of Pentecost, there was another evidence of His gracious work and divine, almighty power. There were three thousand of them. We are not told who they were – young or old, or what they were, who they were. We are told one thing: “And they continued stedfastly” – every single one of them. Some famous, modern evangelicals count it satisfactory if only one out of ten converts still continues to go to a church of chapel. In Acts chapter 2 the whole three thousand of them did! That is the difference between man’s work and God’s work. May we today know more of the power and divine influence of the Holy Spirit.

Well, in coming to the subject here this evening, this prayer: “Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me,” I should like to try to speak of it first of all as it concerned David and his prayer; and then how it concerns a believer personally; and finally how it concerns the church of God.

“Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.” This Psalm was David’s well-known prayer of heartfelt repentance and confession of his sin, and it was answered. And how many down the ages, conscious of their sin and guilt, have felt that David’s language is their language! And did he find mercy? Then perhaps I shall find mercy. David at first seemed to be completely unconcerned. There were two dreadful sins: adultery first of all, and then seeking to cover it by what almost amounted to murder. It must have been murder in the sight of a holy God. But when the prophet said, “Thou art the man,” that was the living witness of the Holy Spirit in his heart that he was guilty. But it was as we sing:

“Guilty, but with heart relenting,
Overwhelmed with helpless grief.”

And this is his prayer of confession, and he starts with this: mercy. His only hope, his only plea – mercy. “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness.” And he takes mercy up again: “According unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.” He wants to be forgiven. He wants to be cleansed. He wants there to be a sanctifying effect. He wants to be kept. That is the Holy Spirit’s work in a sinner’s heart in humble confession.

So, “Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.... Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” You know what hyssop was. It was a little plant which they used for the sprinkling of the blood. And that is what David felt his need of – an interest in the blood that atones for sin. But he wanted a personal interest in it. Me, Lord, he said. “Purge *me* with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash *me*, and I shall be whiter than snow.... Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart.” He knew his heart was not clean; he wanted a clean heart. He knew it must be a creation. “Renew a right spirit.” How often we know a wrong spirit. “Renew a right spirit within me.”

And then, “Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.” Just how much David knew of the Person and the work of the Holy Spirit, we do not know, and we cannot attempt to guess, but we do know what his feeling was here. He felt that he deserved, because of his sin, the Lord to leave him, the Lord to forsake him. But he

thought that was everlasting death, everlasting despair, and really here, whatever he understood or whatever he did not understand, he was praying that in His mercy, though he deserved it, the Lord would not cast him away, the Lord would not take His Holy Spirit from him, the Lord would not forsake him. But don't you and I sometimes feel that, as if we deserve that the Lord should forsake us? But that prayer, "Hide not Thy face far from me.... Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation." It comes in the little children's hymn. Some of those little children's hymns have some good divinity in them.

"Never leave me, nor forsake me,
Ever be my Friend,
For I need Thee from life's dawning
To its end."

"Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." "Never leave me, nor forsake me," though that is what I deserve.

"Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation." So there is a joy in salvation. Salvation can never be lost, but the joy of salvation can be lost, and often is lost. But the joy of salvation can be restored. "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation." He is praying to the Holy Spirit again. He wants to be upheld; he wants to be divinely kept. "Uphold me with Thy free Spirit." And beloved friends, the prayer of Psalm 51 was heard, because David was forgiven and David was cleansed in the Saviour's blood and David is now in heaven, a trophy of free grace and redeeming love and blood. So David's prayer here was answered. The Lord did not forsake him. The Lord did not take His Holy Spirit from him. And this prayer, when prayed from the heart, the Lord will hear it and answer it. If any of you through grace can come in with this prayer, the language of it, the spirit of it, then that prayer must be answered; that prayer will be answered.

"Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." Well, so much for David. Now let us come to ourselves, or let us think of believers. If you and I are true believers, then that was the work of the Holy Spirit. Before that we were dead in sin; we had no interest; we had no concern. It was the Holy Spirit's work to give life; it is the Holy Spirit's work to maintain life. It was the Holy Spirit who brought us to pray and taught us to pray. It was

the Holy Spirit who led us to the Lord Jesus. It was the Holy Spirit who made the Lord Jesus known as the Saviour. It was the Holy Spirit who gave us faith, who enabled us to believe, because every grace in our heart from first to last is the work of the Holy Spirit. So if you and I are saved by grace, if we are true believers, this is the work of the Holy Spirit. And let us be very clear on this point, that the Holy Spirit never, never forsakes His own work. If the Holy Spirit has begun to work in your heart, then He will never forsake His own work, and He will never forsake you.

So why do people sometimes pray a prayer like this: “Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me”? In the Church of England prayer book, in the daily prayers on the Lord’s day – well it always was, whether it still is – this was one of the prayers. There was controversy about it. Some who took a hard line said you should not pray this prayer; the Lord will never take His Holy Spirit away from a believer. In the Old Testament, they said, it was different; you should not pray it now. But why is it the Lord’s people sometimes pray this prayer if there is such a clear, blessed revelation, “Whom once He loves He never leaves, but loves him to the end”? For one simple reason: they feel they deserve it. “If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” I deserve that Thou shouldest leave me, and I pray in Thy mercy that Thou wilt never leave me, though if Thou dost leave me, it will be an evidence that Thou didst never begin with me.

“Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.” This is not a wrong statement. God’s people sometimes when they are tried and troubled are not always logical in their prayers, but the Lord Jesus in His compassion and mercy does not misunderstand you. If your religion is real, the Lord never will leave you or forsake you, but there will be times when you feel so unworthy, you say, Lord, *do not* leave me; *do not* forsake me. And the wonderful thing: He never will. “For He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” “The Lord will not forsake His people for His great name’s sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you His people” – that glorious truth of the everlasting security of the people of God in Christ.

“Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.” But then there is another way in which God’s people at times pray this prayer. Though the Holy Spirit will never leave the believer, the believer is not always under the

sacred influence of the Holy Spirit. Let me appeal to you, those of you who believe you have known the Lord's work, bringing you to be a true believer, a sinner saved by grace. You do not always feel that you are under the sacred power and influence of the Holy Spirit. In your hearing, it is not always the Holy Spirit bringing the Word with power to your soul. In reading, it is not always the Holy Spirit enlightening your eyes. As you go about, it is not always the Holy Spirit touching, softening your heart. What I am coming to is this: that though the Holy Spirit will never, never leave a sinner saved by grace, there are times when He withdraws His gracious influences, and that is what Cowper meant in his well-known hymn, "O for a closer walk with God." He said,

"Return, O holy Dove! return,
Sweet Messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,
And drove Thee from my breast."

Haven't I heard hard-doctrine men when I was young abhorring that verse, saying it was completely wrong! I think God's people, graciously taught, understand it. The Holy Spirit will never withdraw finally, but He hides His face and He withdraws at times His sacred influences, especially when His people become carnal and prayerless and indifferent and do not walk worthy. And that is not legality.

"Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." But then to speak of this as it concerns the church of God. It is specially in this way that this word was impressed on me. This is our anniversary day. At our prayer meetings, often the brethren pray this prayer, that the Holy Spirit will not be taken away from us, and it is a good prayer. Let us be very clear: there is a vital difference between a child of God and a gospel church. The Holy Spirit never finally withdraws Himself from the heart of a child of God, but solemnly He does at times withdraw Himself from a gospel church, and that is the end of all prosperity. So it is a terrible thing. It is "Ichabod" written over the doors. Now may it never happen here, because one thing seems to be very clear, that when the Holy Spirit withdraws Himself from a church and a congregation, He never returns. Now there may be just a few poor people, and there may be just one or two of them, but the Holy Spirit has not forsaken them; but there may be a place with many people, and if the Holy Spirit is withdrawn from them, it seems He never returns.

Look at those New Testament churches. Were there ever churches who were so blessed with the Holy Spirit? Read the Epistle to the Romans. What a blessed church the church at Rome was! Well, it is the same church today, the Roman Catholic church, but long ago the Holy Spirit has withdrawn Himself from it. But you could think of those other churches. What about Ephesus and those churches in the Epistle to the Galatians, and the Colossians, or when you come to the seven churches of Asia Minor? Where are all these churches today? They were once so favoured, they were once so abundantly blessed, but the time came when the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from them. You can think of godly people like the Huguenots. We love to read those accounts of the Huguenots, but it is not only that they were persecuted, but it seems that because they turned away in doctrine from the Lord, He left them.

So this prayer: “Take not Thy Holy Spirit from us.” But there is also this: the Holy Spirit not finally being taken away from a church, but being grieved, or being quenched, and withdrawing His sacred influences. I want to speak advisedly, but I fear in very many of our churches and congregations that is what has happened: the solemn withdrawing of the Holy Spirit – we hope not finally, but surely because the Holy Spirit has been grieved. O to be kept from grieving the Holy Spirit – when there are things wrong, and openly wrong, and badly wrong, and the church will not deal with them. They do not want to offend, yet they offend Almighty God, and He is grieved, and the Spirit is withdrawn. Or disunity and conflict. Dr. Watts in one of his hymns, not in our book, says,

“The Holy Spirit like a dove
Does from the realms of strife depart.”

Now the Holy Spirit sometimes withdraws finally from a church, but there are many occasions when in measure the Holy Spirit is taken away, and it seems that generally the churches live under this today, and this is what we dread, and this is what we pray about, and this is why the brethren pray about it at our prayer meetings – “O take not Thy Holy Spirit from us” – because there is a realisation of this: if in any church and if amongst us there has been any blessing in any way, it is the Holy Spirit’s work. If the preaching is ever profitable, it is the Holy Spirit’s work. If your hearts are ever touched, it is the Holy Spirit’s work. If you have a

spirit of gratitude, that is the Holy Spirit's work. If your soul is humbled, if you have a spirit of worship, that is the Holy Spirit's work.

Apart from the Holy Spirit working in a church, in a congregation, that place must be destitute. There is no real, spiritual profit without it, and that is not thinking always of wonderful blessings or very marked things, but it is things like this: "When the Comforter is come ... He shall testify of Me" – His gracious presence as the divine Comforter, breathing comfort where distress abounds, bringing comfort to your hearts, in your bereavements and trials, and also in your spiritual concerns. Things like this: "He shall glorify Me." That is the mark of the Holy Spirit's work always. It will abase the sinner and it will glorify Christ.

Many a young believer at the beginning is tried on this; I was. You feel you know Christ and love Him; you cannot deny it; and then you feel, you do not know much about the Holy Spirit. Well, as the Word of God opens it up, according to the economy of grace and the plan of salvation in the covenant it is the Holy Spirit's work: "He shall not speak of Himself." Jesus said, "He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall shew it unto you."

"The Holy Spirit omits to speak
Of what Himself has done,
And bids the enlightened sinner seek
Salvation in the Son."

Which means this, if you young ones are tried on that point: that every movement of your soul towards Christ, every time you feel any measure of blessing, any time you have a soft heart, any time you know something of love, it is the Holy Spirit's work, and really you cannot dishonour one Person of the Godhead by glorifying another. If you are glorifying Christ because He is precious, you are glorifying the Father and you are glorifying the Holy Spirit.

O but, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from us." If we have known any measure of blessing, great or small, personally or together, or people taught their need, or people led to the Saviour, or people openly professing the Lord's name, or people walking worthy, or people enjoying some experience of the Lord's love – whatever it is – it must come from heaven. It must be the Holy Spirit's work. So that is why the brethren so rightly pray, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from us." What they mean is, may His

loving, kind, gracious, almighty influences still be known here at Bethel, in our midst and in our hearts. May the Holy Spirit still glorify the Son. May He still call sinners by His grace, regenerate them in the new birth. May He still lead them to Christ. May He still lead them to speak of Jesus, to testify. May He still enable them to walk worthy. And where He begins a good work in you, He will perform it till the day of Jesus Christ.

So beloved friends, this is our heartfelt prayer this evening: “Take not Thy Holy Spirit from us.” And in that prayer there is something we specially imply, and it is this: may the Holy Spirit still continue with us, still be amongst us, still dwell in our midst, still dwell in our hearts, still carry on His gracious work to the praise and honour and glory of God. I think we mean all that in that little prayer.

“Take not Thy Holy Spirit from us.” Now there is an answer to this, an answer in Scripture, and may we sweetly together prove this answer. It is a word in the minor prophets that one or two of us used to speak about concerning Bethel, and it is this, and it is a blessed answer to this prayer: “According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt” – this is it; may it prove to be so – “so My Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.”