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Holiness Writers

SYMBOLS OF THE SPIRIT

By

William David McGraw, Jr.

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without
which no man shall see the Lord” Heb 12:14*

Spreading Scriptural Holiness to the World

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SYMBOLS OF THE SPIRIT

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William David McGraw, Jr.

Beacon Hill Press
Kansas City, Missouri

First Printing, 1954

Printed in the United States of America

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Digital Edition 09/29/97
By Holiness Data Ministry

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INTRODUCTION

Words are but vehicles upon which thoughts travel. If the thought in my mind is to be conveyed to your mind, your conception of the meaning of the words I choose must correspond with mine. Many misunderstandings have resulted when words used by a speaker meant something different to him from what was suggested by those words to the mind of the hearer.

An Englishman went to a men's clothing store in New York City and asked for a pair of braces. He was told that braces were sold in hardware stores.

"Strange!" said the Englishman. "In my country braces are sold in a haberdashery. But while I'm in here, I'll take a pair of suspenders."

The clerk handed him a pair of trouser suspenders, whereupon the customer expostulated: "What's going on here? I ask you for braces and you say you don't have them. Then when I ask for suspenders, you give me braces. Are you trying to pull my leg, or something?"

The difficulty was resolved when the clerk understood that in England braces are to hold up the trousers, and suspenders are for socks. Even in the same language, we often experience a problem in seeking to convey thoughts from one mind to another.

In the language of "Canaan" we find this difficulty, also. One of our home-mission evangelists in a Midwestern state was about to begin a revival meeting. He had the tent up, the seats in, platform and pulpit built, piano ready, when suddenly he realized he had overlooked a very important fixture. He rushed down to the lumber yard just before closing time, and said,

"I want a 2 x 6 about twenty feet long down at the tent, for an altar."

"An altar?" the clerk queried. "What's an altar?"

"Well," the preacher said, "you know we are going to hold evangelistic services there and, after we have preached, we will be inviting sinners to come down to the altar and pray through."

"Pray through ... pray through." The clerk was clearly puzzled. "Man, why don't you get a piece of pipe? It would be a lot easier to pray through a piece of pipe, wouldn't it, than to pray through a board?"

Much more is the difficulty when in the language of one country you may seek to describe something which is peculiar to another country. I heard once of a missionary who tried to tell some little African children about ice cream. There were no words in their language to describe this delicious confection. Finally the missionary hit upon what she thought was a brilliant idea. Pointing

to a snow-capped mountain, she used the African word for "snow" and added the word for "sweet." Then with what words were at her command she told the youngsters that in America there was something like snow, but it was sweet, and people ate it.

She was quite pleased with herself, until the next day she overheard one of the little fellows telling his friend about the strange customs of the Americans. He said that in this country the snow that fell on the mountains was sweet, and people went up there and ate it. Her use of words had failed to get the idea across.

Now, when we consider that many wonderful truths exist in the spiritual realm, and that the only words Christ could use which we understand are those words in human language, we see some of the problems accompanying His revelation to us. No wonder there are so many different ideas in human minds about these precious truths!

God, in His infinite wisdom, has used so many symbols, word pictures, similes, analogies, and other comparisons with things about which we have at least a partial understanding that numerous truths are revealed to us through His Word. It is with this thought in mind that we seek to bring you the ideas developed in the messages that follow. We pray that the Great Teacher, about whom we reverently write, may guide your thinking in such a manner as to make these ideas of greatest value to you. If they can provoke thoughts about Him in your own mind which have not even been in my mind, my own deep desires shall have been realized in the sending forth of these truths.

We understand that the Holy Spirit is One of three Persons in which our one God manifests himself. There is one God, yet He is triune in the revelation of His attributes. This is one of the difficult things to explain in human language.

There is a contrast, however, which helps me understand it a bit better. Perhaps it will be helpful to you.

Man is a trinity which we can comprehend more easily.

Look in the mirror. Do you see yourself completely reflected? No, you see but the body — the mind and spirit are not visible. Man is essentially three, but the three are manifested in one person. You cannot divide them, or compartmentalize his threefold nature into separate units.

Not in the same sense, neither in a perfectly opposite sense, but in a mysterious spirit-world reality which we shall doubtless someday understand as easily, God is one, but manifested in three Persons.

We think of God as Father. But Jesus said, "God is a Spirit." Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit as the "Spirit of Christ." Father, Son, and Spirit are one. So, in studying some similitudes of the Spirit, we find His presence in the world, His work, His glory and blessing, blended in truth with the works and blessing of the Father and the Son.

The most religious people of Jesus' day were paying lip service to the Father while they were rejecting the Son. Our great danger in this dispensation is like theirs — while magnifying and exalting the Son, the Church of today must not ignore the Holy Spirit and His work in the world.

"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness" (Mal. 3:1-3).

We lift out three words, "He is like," and use them as a door through which we enter into our study of "Symbols of the Spirit".

SYMBOLS OF THE SPIRIT

By

William David McGraw, Jr.

I

"He is like" wind, for ventilation.

Wind is air in motion. The importance of air to life is recognized by all. Air, with its precious oxygen, is necessary for every moment of life. The body may survive for many days without food, many hours without water, but only a few moments without breath.

Every tissue of the human body must have life-giving Oxygen, and the air is the agency used to bring it into the blood stream. The lungs breathe the air, extract from it the oxygen, pass it into the blood stream for transmission to every cell of the body, even its most remote extremities.

A small boy had just studied these functions in his physiology class. His mother had a time getting him to go to bed that night. Finally, in exasperation, she said: "What is the matter with you? You've often wanted to stay up past bedtime, but never in all your life have I had such a time to get you to go to bed. What's got into you?"

"I'm afraid."

"What is there to be afraid of, any more than last night, or other nights?" the mother reasoned.

"I'm afraid I'll die. Teacher told us today that if we stopped breathing for just a few minutes, we would die. I'm afraid if I go to sleep I'll quit breathing."

"Oh, never mind, Sonny. The Lord has fixed our bodies so that even when we are asleep our lungs will keep right on breathing. We don't even have to try to breathe. Don't you be afraid any more."

What air is to the human existence, the Holy Spirit is to our spiritual life. When Adam was completed in creation, God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

We breathe of His presence even in our unconscious hours, if we are possessed with the Holy Spirit. Life-giving spiritual oxygen is taken through processes as real as those of the human blood stream to every area of our spiritual existence.

Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones was doubtless a revelation of God's plan to gather Israel at some future date, and restore them to national life. But after bone had joined bone, and flesh and sinews came upon the bones, there was no life in them.

"Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live" (Ezek. 37:9).

A reading of verses following will give the interpretation of the vision. Although the whole house of Israel was cut off and hopelessly scattered among the other nations, His promise was to open their graves, bring them back into their land, and put His Spirit in them.

Jesus also likens the Spirit to wind. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). And when His promise was so wonderfully fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, one of the phenomena which accompanied the coming of the Spirit was the sound of a rushing mighty wind.

He is like wind, for ventilation.

SYMBOLS OF THE SPIRIT

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II

"He is like" water, for sanitation.

Water is not only a symbol for cleansing, but also an effective agent to cleanse. Applied externally, water cleanses away the pollution acquired from without. By drinking it, through properly functioning natural processes, it cleanses away poisons and impurities accumulated within.

Americans are probably the most sanitary people in the world. We are told that consumption of water averages 1,100 gallons a day for every man, woman, and child in the nation. Our use of water in such great quantities is causing widespread concern in some areas of the country where the water table is constantly becoming lower. Most cities of any size are located either on or near a river or some large body of water. We do not like the stench of unsanitary physical conditions.

Would it not be a real blessing if we should also insist upon clean hearts, minds, and spirits? God cannot tolerate filth. Old Testament rituals kept always before the minds of His people the demands of His righteousness for a clean people.

"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you" (Ezek. 36:25).

One cannot expect to take a bath in the early spring, and make it last throughout the hot summer. Even the cold of winter does not eliminate the necessity of washing frequently if we would be clean.

Neither can we expect that our cleansing is unconditionally assured even when we have been washed with the water of regeneration. And the inner cleansing of the Spirit in sanctifying power is not the final application. If we would keep clean, we must abide constantly in the flow of the fountain opened in the house of David for sin and uncleanness.

Walking one day in his father's pasture, a small boy saw in the clear, shallow stream winding across it a beautiful stone. It glistened in the sunlight, and changed from one gorgeous color to another when viewed from different angles. The barefoot chap jumped down into the brook and picked up the stone. Back up on the bank he looked at it in his hand, and it had a dull, lusterless appearance.

Puzzled, he looked back into the stream to see if he had picked up the wrong stone. But no beauty could be seen in any that lay on the bottom. He tossed the stone back into the water, and immediately the crystal-clear stream flowing over it caused the beautiful colors to appear again.

Once more he removed it, only to find it dull and uninviting. He said to himself: "I can't take it home and admire it on the dresser in my room, like I wanted to. I'll just have to leave it out here in the water; and when I want to see its beauty, I'll come back and look at it here."

Our lives, beautified by the flow from Calvary, can reflect the glory and beauty of the Holy Spirit only as we are constantly submerged in Him. We need the instantaneous work of the Spirit in His mighty baptism for purity; but it will not suffice for long if we do not, by perpetuating the same conditions we met to receive His infilling presence, retain daily, moment by moment, His cleansing power.

Someone has suggested that the tense of the verbs in I John 1:7 is such that it would do no violence to the meaning of the words if read thus: "If we continue to walk in the light, as he is in the light, we will continue to have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son will continue to cleanse us from all sin."

The taking of water internally is also symbolic of the Spirit's ministry of cleansing.

When the supply of moisture in the human system is low, nature's way of urging us to replenish the supply is through a physical thirst. The slaking of thirst with cool, sparkling water is a satisfying experience.

It has been suggested that physical hunger and thirst are much stronger urges than the desire for satisfying the needs of the other two sides of our natures: mental and spiritual. When your stomach is empty, pangs will persist until something is done to satisfy the hunger. But when the head is empty, no such annoying urges persist to nudge us into learning; and when the heart is empty we are not driven to satisfy our spiritual hunger and thirst by such irresistible urges.

This may be true to some degree. But it is possible for such a desire for knowledge to exist that one will make almost any sacrifice in order to further his education. And I know from experience that there can develop in the innermost being a thirsting for the Spirit of God that will drive one to make any sacrifice in order to slake that thirst with His satisfying presence.

Doubtless Jesus had this in mind when He said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive)" (John 7:37-39).

The cleansing of the Church "with the washing of water by the word" not only takes care of the innermost needs of the thirsty, but also provides us with an inexhaustible supply of spiritual moisture which will gush out from us to create thirst and hope in the famishing multitudes who may come within the sphere of our influence.

He is like water, for sanitation.

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III

"He is like" a sword, for separation.

"Take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17).

"The word of God is ... sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

The gospel of Christ is a gospel of separation. From the time that God called Abraham from his home, his people, his country, to go into a land whither he knew not, He has demanded a separate people. Israel was not to mix with other nations. Separation was taught in the law. The ox and the ass must not be plowed together. The priests were not to wear clothes made from both animal (wool) and vegetable (linen).

Paul says Christ "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar [separate] people, zealous of good works" (Tit. 2:14).

Jesus said: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother ... And a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matt. 10:34-36).

Three places in John record divisions among the people (7:43; 9:16; 10:19). The division came because of (1) what people were saying about Jesus, (2) the deeds which Jesus performed, and (3) what Christ said about himself.

The Holy Spirit in the world today precipitates divisions and separations — not because He is pleased to have people at variance with one another, but that the attitude which we take toward the truth He comes to reveal causes a natural division among us.

Those who receive the Word of God, and the works of the Holy Spirit in regenerating and sanctifying power, will find a cleavage between them and the world. Holiness and filthiness will not mix. White and black may be mixed enough to give the appearance of grayness to the eyes, but righteousness and impurity cannot be blended into an intermediate moral state.

The Holy Spirit is the divine Separator. John the Baptist said of the coming Saviour, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:11, 12).

The figure here was familiar to John's hearers. They had seen the Oriental threshing floor upon which the grain had been forced from the heads by a crude beam or by foot. They had seen the thrasher's fan, which was used to separate the chaff from the wheat, so that the grain might be gathered into storage bins and the chaff burned. Before the baptism with fire must come the separation of the dross from the good. And the Holy Ghost accomplishes both of these functions.

The people of God must have this inner separation before they can be happy in the outward separation which they must experience as His holy people. When the chaff has been destroyed within, there is no quarrel with God over the separate way we must go in the world. The pull toward worldliness is gone when nothing but His holiness and righteousness are within.

The fact is, instead of chafing over our peculiar unlikeness to the world, we take pleasure in being different for Christ's sake. We do not want to look like the world in dress; we do not want to act like the world in behavior; we do not want to live like the world in pleasure; we do not want to smell like the world in habits. The separation is not galling, but glorious.

He is like a sword, for separation.

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IV

"He is like" fire, for purification.

"He is like a refiner's fire ... He shall baptize ... with fire."

Impurities which cannot be cleansed with water surrender to the purifying fire. A refiner's fire is the symbol used by Malachi. This is a much more intense heat than ordinary fire, for it must be sufficiently hot to melt the ore if the gold and silver are to be purified from its alloys and dross.

Before foundries were built such as we know today, the crude method for refining metal was to place the ore in a huge cauldron or pot, kindle a fire under it, and keep the heat up until the ore would melt. As it melted, the impurities would rise to the top, forming a thin film of scum. The refiner would skim off this dross with a ladle. As long as an impurity remained, the dull film would keep appearing on the surface of the hot metal. But when no more dross remained to be separated from the pure metal, the refiner could see a perfect image of himself on the molten surface.

The Holy Spirit is the Refiner and Purifier of the sons of Levi — yea, of all the sons of Adam. Water washes away the impurities resulting from the sins of commission, but fire must be used to cleanse away the sins of the disposition. The Holy Spirit is like both water and fire. The work of the Holy Spirit is evident in regeneration, and is also powerfully manifested in the work of sanctification.

I believe it was Andrew Murray who suggested that fire had the ability to transform all that came within its influence to a likeness of itself, rejecting in the form of gases and ashes what was incapable of being thus transformed. So the Holy Spirit, when applying the intense fire of His baptism, transforms us into His own likeness, expelling whatever impure qualities cannot be so transformed.

Fire purges. A terrible sweep of bubonic plague, which took such a frightening toll of life in London several decades ago, was followed by the great fire which was thought by many to be much worse than the plague. But, although it destroyed valuable property, it proved to be a blessing to human life; for after the fire swept the city, the plague died away.

Sin is the scourge of the world. We might flinch at the idea of submitting to the intensity of the fire of the Holy Spirit, but it is the only cure for the plague of sin.

The cloven tongues of fire on the Day of Pentecost were a physical manifestation of the coming of the Holy Spirit. From reading the account of the acts of the apostles following this outpouring of the Spirit, one sees the thoroughness with which the Holy Spirit purified the natures of the disciples on that occasion.

Envy, jealousy, malice, pride, self-seeking, unholy anger, and all other carnal traits which were manifested from time to time in the acts and attitudes of the disciples before the Day of Pentecost were absent in their powerful ministry which followed. Fear of men and public opinion, anxiety for the future, and all else which bespoke a weakness of their faith in the omnipotent Christ, were dissolved and destroyed in the flame of the Pentecostal blessing.

If every redeemed child of God today would bring all his ransomed faculties to the altar of complete consecration, and wait until the fire of the Holy Spirit fell in cleansing power, what a force the Church of the living Christ would be in the world! Half measures will not suffice. We must be all out for Christ, dedicated to His plans, purposes, and Kingdom work, if we are to accomplish the mission He has assigned us. We cannot attain this position one inch short of a complete devotement to Him, and the empowerment the fire of His Spirit brings with full deliverance from carnality.

Yes, He is like fire, for purification.

SYMBOLS OF THE SPIRIT

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V

"He is like" oil, for lubrication.

Oil suggests smoothness. Even the use of oil as ointment is thought of as a soothing quality. And the special anointing oil for the priests under the Levitical law was a type of the anointing of the Holy Spirit for unction. We think of one whose ministry demonstrates the smoothness of a dynamic delivery of the message of God as being anointed and unctionized by the Spirit.

Jesus, although He was the Son of God, did not enter upon His public ministry until the Spirit descended upon Him, anointing Him for His task. He was, according to the writer to the Hebrews, "anointed ... with the oil of gladness" above his fellows.

In our industrialized age, oil plays a most important part as a lubricant. The rubbing of metal surfaces against one another causes friction. Friction produces heat, and too intense a heat can cause irreparable damage. Where moving parts must come in close contact with one another, a film of oil can reduce the friction, and what little heat is generated causes no damage.

Our Christian fellowship is made up of individuals differing in background, heredity, and temperaments. Doubtless human personalities, like vegetable and other life, demonstrate the love God had for variety. With no two leaves alike, no two snowflakes exactly the same, nothing duplicated in nature, even to the fingerprints of the entire human race being as diverse as there are people — all prove the fact that God is pleased with variety.

He does not intend that His children on the earth shall be made uniform by His grace. The coming of the Holy Spirit does unite us, but it does not make us uniform. Saved and sanctified people will not always agree on every matter. Even if some had perfect judgment in every particular, so that they could not err in a position taken with reference to the work of the Kingdom, there would be a sufficient number of us whose judgment is imperfect to disagree with them.

Since this is true, we especially need the oil of the Spirit to keep down damaging friction. Differing opinions sometimes generate a bit of heat; but if there is a sufficient lubricant the heat will be kept to a minimum, and no damage will result. When sanctified Christians disagree, and a course is set which favors the position of some but goes contrary to the position taken by the minority, we can, through the anointing oil of the Holy Spirit, work together in harmony, even while rubbing contrariwise against the others' judgment.

If the baptism of the Spirit cannot do this for us, then what will it take to prevent discord and disharmony among those who disagree? Thank God, we can disagree agreeably, and drive right on to victory, following the course determined by those who disagree with us, even if some may feel that another course would have been wiser.

I heard once of a congregation which decided, through its official board, that their building needed painting. There was no question about the need; it was voted unanimously to paint it. But there was disagreement as to the color. Some wanted it white, and others thought green would be a better color. So they wrangled for a long time, doing nothing; for neither side would give in to the other.

Finally the matter was taken to the entire congregation, and it was divided about half and half. The dissension continued until it drove a wedge in their fellowship. The "whites" would sit on one side of the church during service, and the "greens" on the other side.

To prevent complete decay of the building, they came to a compromise. It was sided with lateral boards about five inches wide, and it was decided to paint one board white all the way around the church, the next one green, and alternate until it had all been painted.

For miles around, that striped church became the laughingstock of the community. It stood there as a monument to the carnality of its members. Such a shameful display of carnal stubbornness would have been avoided with a proper possession of the oil of the Spirit.

He is like oil, for lubrication.

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VI

"He is like" wine, for exhilaration.

Now, before you disagree with this similitude, look at the Scriptures with me. Why do you think Paul mentioned wine and the Spirit in the same breath: "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18).

Why do people drink intoxicating beverages? I am told that it is not because of its taste. Most drinkers with whom I've talked do not particularly like its taste; in fact, some violently dislike it, and follow the whiskey with a chaser to diminish the taste. It is possible that some develop an inordinate taste for it in time; others may inherit a depraved taste for liquor; but most agree that it is not the taste that causes people to drink. Why, then, do they drink? Is it not because of the effects it produces?

When one has taken an intoxicant, he feels light, exhilarated. There is usually a feeling of well-being, of wealth, which accompanies a state of inebriation. It is in this feeling that the drinker seeks to escape reality — he is looking for a sense of light-heartedness, a merry time. If his troubles are particularly heavy, he may souse up so much as to lose all consciousness of the world around him.

It is natural for one to wish to escape the unpleasant; to feel well, happy, and rich. But to seek to produce such a feeling with intoxicants is to resort to false, artificial means. If liquor were not damaging to the body, mind, and spirit (which it most certainly is, in the worst possible way), this artificially induced feeling could not be justified nor perpetuated. Soberness brings one back rudely into the world of reality. And with soberness comes the hang-over. They tell me that this can be fierce! A head the size of a washtub, with every inch of it an ache! What a price to pay for a few moments of unreal, artificially induced merriment!

I think what Paul is saying to the Ephesians is something like this: "It is natural for you to want to feel good. But don't debase this good desire by taking alcohol. Let the Holy Spirit fill you with His presence, and your exhilaration will be real, not artificial."

Phillips translates it: "Don't get your stimulus from wine (for there is always the danger of excessive drinking) but let the Spirit stimulate your souls." ^[1]

If you are filled with the Spirit, you not only feel good; you are good. You not only feel rich; you are rich. Sometimes drunk people spend all their money setting their cronies up to drink, while wife and children are in want for the everyday necessities of life. That false sense of wealth in intoxication can be replaced by a real wealth of grace in the filling of the Spirit.

Of course those times of exhilaration which we enjoy in the fullness of the Spirit do not maintain the same high level at all times. The disciples had to come down from the Mount of Transfiguration, for there was work to be done in the valley. But I am convinced that God does not intend for us to be in the valley too long without a mountain-peak experience. How long since you had an overflowing blessing? How long since you acted in such a way as might have caused someone to think, as they did of the disciples on the Day of Pentecost, "These men are full of new wine."

The religion of Jesus Christ is not a sour, doleful, long-faced affair. He wants us to be joyful, hilarious, cheerful. While there are times of heaviness through manifold temptations, thank God there are also times of exquisite joy through the fresh infilling of His Spirit. Do not let your valley experiences outnumber too disproportionately the times when the Spirit leads you into a high mountain apart. The joy of the Lord is our strength. Let's set our goals for more strength!

He is like wine, for exhilaration.

SYMBOLS OF THE SPIRIT

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VII

"He is like" light, for illumination.

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

As long as He was in the world, Jesus was the Light of the world. He tells His followers that they are also the light of the world, but our light is a reflected light. It can shine out only as the Holy Spirit is in us to illuminate us.

He is Light for our guidance. He is Light also in the sense of helping darkened minds to apprehend the truth. He is Light to reveal to our enlightened minds certain truths of Scripture which would otherwise be obscure and meaningless for us.

It has been my practice for a number of years now to read the Bible through each year in my devotional reading. And I have noticed that I cannot complete the reading of the precious Book without some passages' giving to me truth and meaning beyond what I had previously received from them. The Spirit of God shines upon its pages, revealing treasures both old and new.

He lights our way through life, a step at a time. We cannot see the journey's end from the start. 'Tis best that we can't. The uncertainty of the future is one means for exercising that faith without which it is impossible to please God.

A visitor who stayed longer than he intended at a neighbor's house one evening asked for a light to guide him across the darkened field to his own home. When a lantern casting a very feeble ray was brought, he stepped out into the darkness and complained, "I can't see across the field with this dim thing. Haven't you a brighter light?"

His neighbor asked, "How far can you see with the lantern?"

"Only about four or five feet."

"How long a step can you take?"

"Oh, three feet or so."

"Suppose you take one step, then see if the light shines far enough to show you another one," he suggested.

And of course you know that, when he did that, each time the light provided guidance for the next step, and the next; and on until he was finally at his destination.

The illumination of the Spirit is like that. We do not always have life revealed many steps in advance. But if we walk in the light, following its progress, we will never be in darkness. And walking in the light gives assurance that we will have fellowship with Christ, and His blood will keep us cleansed from all sin.

SYMBOLS OF THE SPIRIT

By

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VIII

"He is like" a teacher, for education.

"The Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26).

The Bible is a wonderful Book of history. It is not primarily a book of history, but it has been found to be historically accurate when it has had anything to say about history.

It is also a work of literary art. It was not designed to be just literature, but in all the writings of earth it cannot be excelled in the field of literature.

The Bible is a thing of poetic beauty. It was not written as a book of poems, but certain sections of it are poetically exquisite. In the original language it stands out much more apparently than in our English translations. In Lamentations, for example, each of the five chapters goes through the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, each verse starting with a letter in its order. In the third chapter there are triplets-three verses starting with each of the twenty-two letters. The Book of Psalms has a similar arrangement in the 119th division. The first eight verses start with "Aleph," and each succeeding eight verses takes the successive letter, through to the final "Tau" in the last eight.

The Bible is not a book of science, but every allusion to scientific truth is accurate without exception. Long before the best educated of earth came around to the idea that the earth was not flat, a Spirit-inspired writer wrote of God sitting upon the circle of the earth. Many passages have taken on new meaning within the last decade, since man has discovered the secret of the atom. Peter doubtless never dreamed of a cyclotron with its atom-splitting ability, but with the most accurate language at his command wrote some things which perhaps are better understood by men today than they were by Peter himself. This is because Peter wrote them under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to whom the atom's secrets were known all along.

Were it not for the Spirit's inspiration, it would be remarkable indeed for four men, with different backgrounds and varying degrees of understanding, to record years afterward the sayings and deeds of the Master, with never a contradiction in their accounts. They did not use the same words. Their stories were not verbally parallel. But when discussing the same teaching, or the same incidents, their language conveys always the thoughts and ideas in a harmonious manner.

This was the work of the Spirit recalling to their memories those words and deeds of the Master, as He promised He would. And the Spirit, guiding each of the sacred writers into all truth, could not contradict himself. Likewise the Spirit teaches us today. Certain experiences through which we pass in the course of our lives prepare us for additional learning under His instruction. His teaching today will be in harmony with His teaching of other years.

If all that is to be known in the science of mathematics were placed within one volume, and this book were given to a child in the third grade, no one would expect him to read it through at once and fathom its broad lore. He would have to learn well the arithmetic before he could master algebra and geometry. It would be several years before he could also understand solid geometry, trigonometry, and calculus.

This is the reason we learn something new every time we read the Bible through. The deeper truths are mixed in with the elementary ones. Something happens this year — the passing through the valley of the shadow of death; or the extreme pressure of some unpleasant experience caused by the shattering of an ideal, perhaps; or an affliction like Paul's thorn in the flesh, which drove us to our knees. Any one of a hundred things can happen which will give the Holy Spirit an opportunity to point out precious truth just for me. We can know many things theoretically, but when we learn them experientially — this knowledge transcends the theoretical.

Blessed be the Lord, for the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit!

SYMBOLS OF THE SPIRIT

By

William David McGraw, Jr.

IX

"He is like" a guide, for explanation.

"When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

Some while ago my wife and I visited, with friends, a museum in Mexico City. The works of art which were on exhibit there were quite interesting but, since each brief identification was in a language unfamiliar to us, the full meanings were hidden.

There was, however, a man who was familiar not only with the language but with the history of the works of art, and with the scenes and events which inspired them. He also talked our language, and with him as our guide the display became very interesting and informative, indeed.

It seems to be the purpose of God to keep some things shrouded in mystery. We do not always know the why of things coming into our experiences. And while Providence does not undertake to explain everything, we may be thankful that His Spirit is here, not only to guide us into all truth, but to offer some very plausible explanations of certain events to us.

I am thinking now of one thing that happened to me during a pastorate in Kansas City, Kansas. One Saturday evening, after a very busy day, I was on my way home for supper an hour late and quite weary. In the darkness a fine drizzle was falling, and visibility was poor. Just as I made a left turn a few blocks from home, my headlights picked up two boys on a bicycle. They had their heads down against the rain, and were not watching the traffic. Seeing they were headed for a collision, I stopped and gave a blast on the horn. They looked up, but not in time to avoid the collision.

I got out of the car, helped them up from the wet pavement, and saw that one of the boys had skinned his knee; also that the bicycle had its front wheel pretty badly smashed. After taking them downtown to report the accident, and seeing that the boy's injured knee was treated, and that he would get safely home, I went on home too. By now I was more fatigued than before, and another hour late.

My mind was filled with questions. Why did this have to happen to me? And why did it happen at that most inconvenient time? There I was, serving the Lord to the best of my ability, trying to go about my own business, and God permitted this accident to happen to me.

After Sunday's duties were discharged, I went to the home of the boy on Monday, and found he lived with his widowed mother, and that the income he earned from carrying a paper route was about all they had to live on. He used his bicycle in delivering the papers, and there was his badly damaged wheel, and he had no money with which to have it fixed. They were quite disturbed.

As I later recalled, my conversation with them was something like this:

"I don't feel that I was responsible for the accident. The boy was violating two laws — riding after dark without a light, and riding two on the bicycle. I do not believe that any judge or court in the land would hold me responsible. But I'm going to help you get the wheel fixed — not because I think I have to, or that I ought to, but because I want to help.

"I want you to know there was a time when I wouldn't have felt this way. I would have told you to get the wheel fixed the best way you could. What makes me feel differently now is that Christ came into my heart and changed me completely. So don't give me any credit for this help — give it to Jesus. I would not be helping you if it were not for Him, and His miracle-working power in my life."

After dipping into my meager salary to help him with his damaged wheel, I read from the New Testament and had them kneel with me for prayer. I prayed for this boy, nearly sixteen years old, who had never been in Sunday school one time in his life. I prayed for his mother, who was not religious, and whom I had learned knew so little about Christ and salvation. Then we arose; I invited them to church and Sunday school. I don't know if they ever attended as a result of that invitation — I left soon after that for another pastorate. They had not attended up to the time I left, and may never have attended since.

But years later, the Holy Spirit recalled that incident to my mind, and asked me a question: "How do you know but what the Lord permitted the accident to happen as it did because it was the only way He had of getting a Christian to visit that irreligious mother and her boy, and witness for Him and pray in that home?" I do not know for certain that it was the reason. But no one would deny that it might have been.

I know one thing for sure. I have ceased to ask, "Why?" when things like that happen to me. Did you ever notice how much like a whine that word "why" sounds? It ought not to be too noticeably in a Spirit-filled person's vocabulary. The Holy Spirit's explanations, when He chooses to give them, are appreciated. But if our good Guide prefers to let things remain mysterious, it is all right. He will explain someday, perhaps; if He doesn't, it is still all right.

Doesn't it seem a bit out of keeping with our professed faith in the wisdom and infallibility of our wonderful Lord to question His providence?

Why does He permit death to take our loved ones in their most promising hour? My seventeen-year-old brother died of pneumonia in his freshman year at college. He was preparing for the ministry. Why? I do not know. I do not require an explanation. Christ doeth all things well — He makes no mistakes. He may not order some of the things that happen to us. But, while not in His directive will, at least they are in His permissive will. It is not mine to question. I claim His promise to make "all things work together for good to them that love God." I know I love Him. So it will work together for my good, somehow. Bless His wonderful name!

SYMBOLS OF THE SPIRIT

By

William David McGraw, Jr.

X

"He is like" a comforter, for consolation.

"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).

There is no comfort like His comfort. It must be experienced to be understood. I have never been able to find words to my own satisfaction which would convey to others the consolation He brings in time of sorrow.

When a tragic accident took our twelve-year-old son so suddenly from us, kind friends tried to comfort us. Loved ones wept in sympathy with us. The church was kind and understanding, and faithful ministers stood loyally by. But all of these blessings would have left our hearts dismal, with an aching void, had it not been for the consoling presence of the Holy Spirit. He made our grief bearable. He gave us hope for eternity. He recalled to our memory precious promises from the Word which gave us joy in the midst of sorrow.

The twenty-third psalm took on new meaning for us. Had you ever noticed the use of the pronoun in the third person in the first three verses? "The Lord is my shepherd . He maketh me to lie down ... he leadeth me ... He restoreth my soul ..." It sounds a little as if He is absent — off somewhere else. But when "I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," the shift is made to the second person: "Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table ... thou anointest my head ...

When you are called upon to pass through some deep sorrow, bereavement, or disappointment, you will understand better this endearment in a way never before realized.

All praise to Him who did not leave us orphans — comfortless — but gave to us the ever-abiding Holy Comforter, "whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."

SYMBOLS OF THE SPIRIT

By

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ENDNOTES

1 From Letters to Young Churches, Phillips, the Macmillan Co. Used by permission.