

# THE GOSPEL IN EZEKIEL

Illustrated in a Series of Discourses

by

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## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### THE RENOVATOR

**And I will put my spirit within you** (Ezekiel 36:27).

**“There are three that bear record in Heaven: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”**

They form the mystery of one Godhead, and act in harmony. As might be expected, the divine record represents these three Persons as all connected with, and cooperating in creation.

With the honors of a work, usually ascribed to the Father, Paul crowns the Son.

- Mark what he says of the Son—**“By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers;”**

- And speaking elsewhere of God, he says—**“He, who at sundry times, and in divers manners spake to our fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.”**

- Now, as to the third person, or Holy Spirit, we discover indications of his existence even in the Mosaic record of creation.

He appears in the earliest epochs of time, and amid those sublime and magnificent spectacles with which the Bible opens.

The curtain rises upon the first act of creating power, and, through the enveloping shroud of darkness, we see the earth—a shapeless mass, crude and chaotic. It is a world in embryo. **“The earth was without form and void.”**

Yet at this early period, when there was neither golden cloud nor blue sky, nor green land, nor silver sea; when no waves broke upon the shore, and there were no shores for waves to break on; when no mountains rose to greet the morning sun, and there was no sun to shine on them; when no wing of bird was cleaving the silent air, nor fin of fish the waters; when—like the rude and various materials from which an architect intends to rear the fabric he has designed—the elements of fire, air, earth, and water, lay mingled in strange confusion, through the darkness that lies on the face of the deep, we discover some mighty presence. He is moving and at work.

It is the Spirit of God. He presides at the birth of time. He is evoking order from confusion, forming the world in the womb of eternity, and preparing a theater for scenes and events of surpassing grandeur.

Concerning that early period of creation, Moses has recorded this important fact—“**The Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters.**”

In this glorious creation, therefore—in this beautiful world, and the starry skies that rose over it—we behold the mighty monuments of his presence and power.

He sprung the arch of this crystal dome, and studded it over with these gems of light. Listen to the magnificent hymn of the Patriarch—“**He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing. He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it; he hath compassed the waters with bounds, and divideth the sea with his power. By his Spirit he hath garnished the heavens.**”

In the temple of nature, therefore, as in that of grace, we adore a Godhead—the Three in One; and see Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the presiding and co-equal authors of a first creation.

But let us come to man. The pillar is finished, and wants nothing but its capital; the house, built and furnished, now waits its tenant. He is about to be formed who is to be not merely a work, nor a servant, but a son of God; a mirror in which Divinity may complacently contemplate itself; a being who is to exhibit what, amid their bright and beautiful forms, neither sun, nor sea, nor earth could boast of—an image of God.

The crown of creation is to be topped with its brightest gem. This province of the divine empire is to be provided with a king, who, wielding a delegated scepter, shall exercise dominion “over the fish of the sea, the fowls of the air, the cattle, and the creeping things.” It is a great occasion. And, as was worthy of it, the three persons of the Godhead appear. God fashions the plastic clay into the form of man, and molds those features which, given by his hand, have descended to us—bending over the prostrate and inanimate statue, he breathes into its hollow nostrils the element of life; rushing in, this mysterious power sets its organs into play, and, as the heart begins to beat, and the current of the blood to flow, man opens his eyes in life and on the world; but, ere this crowning act—ere, by this greatest act he closes the drama of creation—addressing the Son on this hand and the Spirit upon that, the Father saith, “**Let us make man in our image.**”

In many respects, the new creation corresponds with that old one—the Paradise Regained with the Paradise Lost Man is the subject of both; his good and the divine glory are the ends of both; devils are the enemies, and angels are the allies of both; the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are the authors of both, Now while the first chapter of Genesis—raising a portion of the vail which hangs upon the mysteries of creation—shows us the Holy Spirit as an active agent in that work, my text introduces the same divine person, as discharging functions as important in the more exalted and enduring work of a new creation. The Father decrees redemption; the Son procures it; the Holy Spirit applies it. For that purpose this promise is both given and fulfilled—“**I will put my Spirit within you.**”

In illustration of the doctrine, I remark—

*I. The Holy Spirit is the great agent in conversion and sanctification.*

Man cannot be saved unless elected, nor elected without the Father; nor saved unless redeemed, nor redeemed without the Son; nor saved unless converted, nor converted without the Spirit. And yet, God only elects those that by his foreknowledge he sees, by their free will, will choose to respond to Him. Do you ask why? Is there not a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness? Is it not true that whosoever seeks salvation there, may wash and shall be clean? Most true. Jesus has filled that fountain with blood, and, once bathed there, the foulest become white as snow. Blessed truth! that fountain is free to all; free as air, free as light, free as the waves of ocean, where man, who parcels out God's earth, and forbids other foot than his own to tread on it, claims no exclusive property—where the beggar may go in to bathe abreast of a king.

What need I more, then? you may ask. We require much more. Our necessities are those of the cripple—of that man who, for thirty years, sat uncured by Bethesda's pool, nor took his anxious eye off the water as he waited for its first stir and ruffle. The healing of that pool was regulated by a law, and it was this. Like an electric battery, which to one and the first touch discharges all its fluid, this pool cured but one at a time, and he got its benefit who first stepped in after the angel's descent. Whatever his disease might be, he was cured.

- Was he dumb? he sung.
- Was he lame? he leaped.
- Was he a cripple? he shouldered his crutch, and walked.

And why had this man sat out these weary years unhealed? Had the vision tarried, and was it the rare advent of the angel to this pool which suggested the figure, "Like angels' visits, few and far between?" Had these waters not been agitated at all for that long period of thirty years? Often. Many a time this cripple had seen the sudden spring, and heard the loud plunge, as some neighbor flashed into the water; and as the cured left the scene, many a time had he followed them with envious eyes. Many a time had he witnessed proofs of the healing power—the lame man bounding away like a deer, the song of the dumb ringing out his joy, and pallid sickness standing on the brim of the glassy pool, and—as she contemplated herself in its mirror—smiling to see the light of her beaming eyes, and fresh roses blooming upon her wasted cheek.

Poor man! why was he not cured as well as others? He was impotent, powerless; he could not go down unassisted; and—one of the friendless poor, as he told Jesus—"he had no one to help him in." Even so, although seated by the fountain, where sins are lost and sinners washed, we need someone, so to speak, to help us in. In the words of Paul, we are "**without strength;**" and it is to help us to seek, to believe in, to love—in one word, to embrace the Saviour—that God puts his Spirit within us. For this end he fulfills the promise, "**My grace shall be sufficient for thee, and my strength made perfect in weakness.**"

In a preceding discourse, we compared the change wrought in conversion to the removal of old, shattered machinery, and the supplying of its place with a new mechanism. But what is mere machinery? Just what the new heart were without the Spirit of God. Besides the machinery, we must have a moving power.

Of what use would be the machinery which is to be moved, without a force adequate to move it? Without a mainspring within the clock, however complete all its wheels, pinions, pivots, and axles, these hands would stand on the face of time, nor advance one step over the numbered hours. So were it with the renewed soul without the Spirit of God to set its powers in motion, bring them into play, and impart to them a true and heavenward character. For this purpose God fulfills the promise, **“I will put my Spirit within you.”**

In order to illustrate this, and with God’s blessing fix it in your heart, let me avail myself of the element which gives a name to the Spirit, and which our Saviour selects as his emblem—**“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth, so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”**

Here is a noble ship: what further does she need to move her? Her masts are all in; and her canvas is all shaken out; yet no ripple runs by her side, nor foam flashes from her bows, and she has no motion but what she receives from the alternate swell and sinking of the wave. Her machinery is complete. The forests have masted her; in many a broad yard of canvas a hundred looms have given her wings; her anchor has been weighed to the rude sea chant; the needle trembles on her deck; with his eye on that friend—unlike worldly friends—as true in storm as in calm, the helmsman stands impatient by the wheel; and when, as men bound to a distant shore, the crew have said farewell to wives and children, why lies she there over the self-same ground—rising with the flowing, and falling with the ebbing tide? The cause is plain. They want a wind to raise that drooping pennon, and fill these empty sails.

They look to heaven—and so they may—the skies only can help them here. At length their prayer is heard; the pennon flutters at the mast head; spirits of the air sing aloft upon the yards; the sails swell; the wind whistles through the rattling cordage; and now, like a steed, touched by the rider’s spur, she starts, bounds forward, plunges through the waves, and—heaven’s wind her moving power—she is off and away, amid blessings and prayers, to the land she is bound and chartered for. Even so, although heaven-born, heaven-called, heaven-bound, endowed with a new heart, new mind, new will, we stand in the same need of celestial influences—of the grace and Spirit of God. That heart, mind, and will, are the machinery, he is the moving power; these the instruments, and he the agent.

This heavenly gift neither circumscribes nor supersedes our own exertions. These gracious influences descend not to set us idle, any more than the breeze blows to send the sailor to his hammock and rock him over in the arms of sleep.

On the contrary, long away, and wearying to be home, his eye often turned homeward across the water’s waste, he shakes out every yard of canvas on the bending mast, and works the harder to gain the full advantage of propitious winds. It should be so with us. May it be so with us!

The more full the gifts and divine breathings of the Spirit, the busier let us be—busier in the use of prayer, of the Bible, and of all those ordinances through which the Spirit works, and impels souls onward and homeward in a heavenly course.

Were God, provoked by our indifference, to withdraw or withhold his Spirit, would it not be with the best of us as in a dead calm at sea? No progress would be, or could be made; or rather, with the run of the tide against us—the tendencies of a depraved nature and a wicked world working the other way—instead of gaining ground, we should lose the ground already gained, and drift astern.

The Bible says, “**Remember Lot’s wife.**” Here we say, Remember David. With what full sail he is bearing on to heaven! how far ahead he has shot of his countrymen and contemporaries! But he enters into temptation; yields to it; falls into sin; the Spirit is withdrawn, and, although finally saved, how nearly is he lost! What a fearful backsliding! what an awful warning! and, yet—an example most encouraging to a penitent backslider—see how God fulfills the promise, “**I will heal thy backsliding and love thee freely.**”

Let me now urge on you the advantage and duty of improving to the utmost every season of heavenly visitation. There are seasons more favorable and full of grace than others. In this there is nothing surprising, but much that is in harmony with the common dispensations of Providence. Does not the success of the farmer, seaman, merchant, of men in many other circumstances, chiefly depend on their seizing opportunities, which come and go like showers—which flow and ebb like the tides of ocean? The sea is not always full. Twice a day she deserts her shores, and leaves the vessels high and dry upon the beach; so that they who would sail must wait and watch, and take the tide; and larger ships can only get afloat, or, if afloat, get across the bar and into harbor, when, through a favorable conjunction of celestial influences, the sea swells in stream or spring tides beyond her common bounds. The seaman has his spring tides; the husbandman has his spring time, and those showers, and soft winds, and sunny hours, on the prompt and diligent improvement of which the state of his barn and barn yards depends.

“**Let it be,**” said the Lord to David and his men of war, when—lying in ambush, and expecting divine assistance—they waited for the signal of battle, “**let it be, when thou hearest the sound of going on the tops of the mulberry trees, that thou shalt bestir thyself.**” Such a signal, like the feet of the angelic host marching over the tops of the trees, heaven may vouchsafe to us in the holy desire, emotion, and thought of the Spirit’s call, which, if yielded to and improved, may lead to heaven; but neglected, rejected, or repelled, may leave us to perish in hell. In these, which occasionally come to the most careless sinner, you hear the Spirit moving—in them you hear the Spirit calling. Improve them through saving faith.

If improved, who can tell but it may be with you as with one well known to us. She was a fair enough professor, yet had been living a careless, godless, Christless life. She awoke one morning, and, most strange and unaccountable! her waking feeling was a strong desire to pray. She wondered. It was early dawn, and what more natural than that she should say, there is time enough—meanwhile “**a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep?**”

As she was sinking back again into unconsciousness, suddenly, with the brightness and power of lightning, a thought flashed into her mind, filling her with alarm—this desire may have come from God; this may be the hour of my destiny —this, the tide of salvation, which, if neglected, may never return. She rose, and flung herself on her knees. The chamber was changed into a Peniel, and when the morning sun looked in at her window, he found her wrestling with God in prayer; and, like one from a sepulcher, she came forth that day at the call of Jesus to follow him henceforth, and in her future life to walk this world with God.

II. *God's Spirit is not only given to his people, but dwells in them. "I will put my Spirit within you."*

The communication between spirits, otherwise than through the medium of matter, and our bodily organs, is so great a mystery, that we are not prepared to say how far unconverted men may or may not be "**possessed of the devil.**" Of many a wretched slave of vice, on whom tears, and prayers, and expostulations, and rewards, and punishments, have all been tried, and tried in vain, it may be said without exaggeration, "**He is grievously tormented of a devil.**"

There are incidents and expressions also in the Word of God, which invest the subject of demoniacal possession with a painful and very alarming interest. On one occasion Peter endeavors to dissuade his Master from the cross, and stands between him and the salvation of the lost! whereupon, as if he saw the devil looking through a disciple's eyes, and heard his speech in a disciple's tongue, Jesus turned on Peter, saying—"Get thee behind me, Satan."

Again, when Judas received the sop, it is said that "**Satan entered into him,**" and immediately—as the ship turns to the helm, when a new hand steps on board, and taking it changes her course—he left the supper table, to do his Master's business. Again, Paul speaks of a "**fellowship with devils,**" a "**cup of devils,**" and a "**devil's table.**"

Who knows but that those terrible spectacles of possession, where the bodies of unhappy men were seized, inhabited, tormented by unclean spirits, may have been visible emblems of the unclean and unconverted heart? When God left man at the Fall, and abandoned that heart which had once been his holy and happy home, it became a vacant, empty house for Satan to occupy; and, like bands of robbers, who haunt some ruined castle, where power and grandeur and rank once resided, many devils may be secretly lurking in the dark chambers of this desolate and dismantled palace.

We have sometimes thought that we saw the fittest emblem of man's fallen state, in the ruins of an old church. Now deserted, desecrated, defiled, what a change is there, save in the ivy, that like pity clings to the crumbling wall—sustaining and vailing its decay—and in some sweet wild flower rooted in window sill, or gaping rent, beauty and life are gone. Yet there, once on a time, holy words were spoken; holy vows were taken, and holy communions held. There are eyes in glory that turn with interest to that lonely spot—God and man often met within these roofless walls; "This and that man was born there." But now the only sounds are the sighing of the wind, or the roar of the storm—the hoot of the owl, or the hiss of the serpent; nor life is found there now, but in the brood of the night bird, which has its nest among the ruins above, or in the worms that fatten upon the dead in their cold graves below. "**The glory is departed.**"

And once a shrine of God, but now a deserted sanctuary, may we not write “**Ichabod**” on the heart? The ruin resounds with the echoes which the ear of fancy hears muttering among the desolate heaps of Babylon—“**Fallen, fallen, fallen!**”

Whatever habitation the prince of darkness may have within unconverted men—and however, also, holding for a time some footing even in God’s people, he may raise up within them those thoughts of blasphemy, and desires of sin, which come as unbidden as they are unwelcome—the saints of God enjoy a blessed possession. Not the angels, but the Spirit of God inhabits them. Heaven has descended into their bosoms, and their bodies are become a holy temple. God now in very truth not only dwells “**with man,**” but *in* man. “**I will put my Spirit within you.**” He is enshrined within them; and as the soul dwells in the body, God dwells in the soul. “**Know ye not,**” says an apostle, “**that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?**” Thus—although in a subordinate sense—the members resemble their crowned and exalted head; their bodies, like his own, are a temple, and the heart of the believer is the happy, honored shrine of him whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain.

Speaking of the man that loves him, our Lord said, “**We will come unto him.**” This promise is one which he fulfills in the daily communications of his word and Spirit. Earth has no lovers who meet so often as Jesus and his bride. The lowliest and poorest Christian God honors with daily visits. He comes at the time of prayer; He occupies the mercy seat at the stated hour of worship; and into the closet where the good man goes, he goes along with him. He is closeted there with God; and comes forth like a warrior from his tent, inspired with courage, and armed for the battle of life.

- Happy man! he sleeps at night in God’s arms;
- Happy man! in every trial he weeps on God’s bosom!
- Happy man! although his fare be but a crust of bread and cup of water, he dines every day at heaven’s royal table.

Contented, not coveting the luxuries which wealth commands, he has bread to eat and company to keep the world knows not of; and, although he be the poorest of God’s poor ones, there are none of the great ones of this earth, who, with their privileged and prized access to court, move in such high society. Could you see the angels who wing their flight to this straw-thatched cottage—the telegraph of prayer, that, with extended lines stretched up to the throne, is ever working—the messages that go up, and the answers that come down—Jesus himself descending to bow his kingly head at that lowly door, with “Peace to this house” on his lips, gifts in his hand, love beaming in his eye and burning in his bosom, you would not wonder how the poor pious man can suffer so many hardships, and yet live so contented. Pitying the poverty of riches, the meanness of rank, the littleness of greatness—envying no man his high acquaintances, coveting no man’s large estates—all he needs is to wear his honors meekly; with a rank higher than kings possess or kings can bestow, with a patent of nobility that never can be forfeited, all he needs is to be “clothed within humility;” while he opens his heart and invites his Lord to come in, all he needs is to do that with the modesty of the man who said, “**I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter beneath my roof.**”

Here, however—as also in those words of Christ, to which I have referred—God not only promises to visit his people, but by his Spirit to abide with them. **“I will put my Spirit within you.”** **“Happy is that people whose God is the Lord,”** For who or what else abides? Not our parents or pastors; the arms that embraced us are moldering in the grave, and on the lips that taught us knowledge the dust of death lies thick. Our health may not abide; there is a griefless, graveless land, where the inhabitant never says that he is sick; but faith lifts her eye to heaven, and seeks it yonder—not here. Our wealth may not abide; and so one who, better than many, remembered its uncertainty, when remonstrated with for giving lavishly to the cause of Christ, replied, “Riches take to themselves wings and flee away; and I think it best to clip them.” Our children may not abide; the earth sounds hollow to the foot—it is so full of graves.

Ah! how few gardens are there where death has not left his foot prints, when he came to steal away some of our sweetest flowers, Few are the trees standing on this earth, from which he has not lopped off some goodly boughs. In this world, have I not seen one and another stand bleak and branchless; and Oh, how blessed for the father who has laid the last survivor in the dust and returns from that saddest funeral to find God waiting for him in his desolate home!

When the believer is alone—God in his Holy Spirit abiding with him—he is not alone.

How happy, yet how strange a man he is! Those paradoxes by which Paul describes him—**“Unknown, and yet well known; dying, and behold we live; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing all things”**—admit of important additions.

Kill him, and he lives; bury him, and he rises; exalt him, and he is humbled; humble him, and he is exalted; curse him, and he prays for you; hate him, and he loves you; an orphan, he clings to a living father; a widow, she sleeps on the bosom of a living husband. **“A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widow is God in his holy habitation.”**

Piety sits on a husband or father’s grave, confident in that living relationship, and calm beneath the protection of him who says—**“You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry unto me, I will surely hear their cry. And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children shall be fatherless.”**

Let a believer never count himself desolate. Let others never call him so. If thy heart is right, it matters not how mean thy house may be; God shall abide with thee there on earth, till thou leavest this earth to abide with him in heaven.

~ end of chapter 17 ~

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