

SPIRITUAL DYNAMICS

By Rev. Francis J. Archer

"He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matt. 3:11).

What a privilege ours to live in this dispensation, the Dispensation of the Holy Ghost. Since we are thus privileged, however, it is impossible to place too much emphasis on the work and ministry of the blessed Holy Spirit. The entire program of the true church of God, from its inception to the end of time, must be under His leadership. There is no alternative. The Master, who was wisdom incarnate, saw this, and His parting words before His ascension were: "Wait for the promise of the Father." "But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." This was not a mere suggestion but a demand. The commission to "go" to all the world was a blank until filled with Pentecost. The early church followed the parting command of the Master and, despite all the oppositions and persecutions perpetrated by wicked men and devils, saw glorious success in the salvation of souls. Only as the church of today follows the command of the Master can she hope for any degree of permanent success. All else is "as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal."

The Scripture under consideration does not mean that one is to be baptised with the Holy Spirit and then later with a separate baptism of fire, as some suggest. "Fire" is used here as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. "He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost as by fire," is a more accurate rendering.

God has placed a lot of literal fire in this universe. The earth is a molten sea of fire covered only with a thin crust. The sun is one great flame of fire a million times larger than this earth. There are millions of stars, and many of them a million times larger than our sun, and each and every one is a prodigious ball of fire. Fire itself is a mystery. It is not a substance, for it has no weight. It is only in comparatively recent times that it has been discovered that fire is a union of oxygen in the air and carbon in the fuel. It is not at all surprising that the ancients worshipped fire. Who today, after all of the advantages of modern civilization, can fathom the personal flame of the countless heavenly bodies? With the mysteries of fire and the extremely laborious means of kindling it, we can see why the vestal virgins kept constant vigil at the temple altars to make sure that the fire was ever burning. If perchance the fire should go out on the temple altars all business throughout the region was suspended until it was rekindled. What a blessing today if all business were suspended until the flame of "holy fire" was rekindled in the hearts of professing Christians, at the family altars, and in the churches!

We well know that some of the most precious Bible terms have been cruelly distorted and sadly misused, and when one speaks of the baptism with the Holy Ghost many think at once of wild-fire and obstreperous behaviour of fanatical devotees. However, there has always been that problem to a greater or lesser degree. After a most glorious manifestation of the presence of God at a meeting in the tabernacle, under the direction of Moses and Aaron, the two sons of Aaron, desiring to have the same kind of service without the presence of God, "offered strange fire." They lighted their own fire. God showed His dis-

approval by sending out a fire which devoured them—cremated them. What a cremation there would be today throughout the land if God should thus devour all who light their own fires! Nothing is more revolting to common sense than attempted self-blessing—lighting one's own fire. But the baptism with the Holy Spirit, "The Father's supreme gift to believers," is a complete cure for any and all desire for Christless cults, senseless, fanatical jargon and wildfire movements.

The Message of John the Baptist: John was indeed a unique character. His birth was announced by the angel, and he was holy from his birth. "Among those that were born of woman there is not a greater [prophet] than John the Baptist," said Jesus. John knew his message and his mission. "The word of God came unto John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." "And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not, John answered, saying unto them, I indeed baptise you with water * * * unto repentance." "And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptised of him * * * confessing their sins." From the diatessaron of the Gospels concerning the mission and message of John the Baptist, it is very clear that he preached of Jesus, who was to come after him, and that many of them repented of their sins, and believed on Jesus through the message of John and were forgiven of their sins. This premise, this great trust, must be kept in mind if the conclusion is to be scriptural. To those believers the Baptist is speaking when he proclaims the message of the text. John the Beloved gives emphasis to this same essential truth when he under inspiration declares: "But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive." Believers and believers only can receive the baptism with the Holy Ghost.

John the Baptist wore a rugged clerical garb—"camel's hair and a leathern girdle." He was on a diet, a rugged diet—"locusts and wild honey"—and he proclaims a rugged, heart-searching message—"Repentance." That is a much-needed message today, for it is the only way to God and salvation.

The Baptism with the Holy Ghost: At the psychological moment, while "all men mused in their hearts," giving rapt attention to the pertinent words of John, to those believers he suddenly proclaimed: "One mightier than I * * * shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and fire." The term "fire" held great significance for the Jews. To them it meant a visitation of God. Not only so, but it held for them a twofold meaning; either the blessing and benediction of God, or a manifestation of His displeasure and wrath. They would think at once of "The Everlasting Covenant" which God had made with Abraham when the fire passed between the pieces of sacrifice, perhaps of the burning bush or the pillar of fire. But they would also remember the devouring of Nadab and Abihu and the total destruction of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. This two-fold meaning is also contained in the Baptist's message: "He will baptise you with fire, * * * but will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Holy Ghost fire is the one and only fire-escape from the unquenchable fire.

It is not an accident, but an all-important

truth, that when "fire" is used in the Bible with reference to Christian experience it always refers to cleansing, purging and purifying from sin and never to forgiveness of sins. Most fitting indeed is the symbolical use of the blessed Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. The whole burden of the Baptist's message to those who had repented, believed on Him who was to come, and had the knowledge of sins forgiven, was summed up in these most meaningful words: "He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire," Thank God for the work of the Holy Spirit, for He will cleanse the inmost being from "all sin." This was the central message of the early church, and great was her triumph! It was also the theme of Methodism in her remarkable conquest for souls, and it will ever be the message of all who would follow God's ordained plan for world redemption.

"O for that flame of living fire

Which shone so bright in saints of old,
Which bade their souls to heav'n aspire,

Calm in distress, in danger bold.

"Remember, Lord, the ancient days;

Renew Thy work; Thy grace restore;

And while to Thee our hearts we raise,

On us Thy Holy Spirit pour."

—Free Methodist

POST-WAR PLANNING

R. Barclay Warren

Never when we were still at war have such extensive plans been laid for what we shall do after the war. These plans are civic, provincial, national and international in scope. They cover almost every phase of life: educational, physical health, economic, social and religious. That these carefully laid plans, revised and re-revised, will all be carried out, no one for a moment believes. But that it is a good thing to plan for the peace, no one denies.

The question is, "Are we laying our plans on a sound basis?" Are we nearly as concerned about the spiritual welfare of man as we are about his physical and financial conditions? Is our thinking enfeebled by omitting the weightiest consideration? Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33) "These things" refers to the necessities of life of which our heavenly Father knows we have need.

Yet, let us keep on planning for better houses and better living conditions generally. But, let us bear in mind that better houses don't necessarily make better homes, and that it requires more than better health to make better men and women.

Oh, for an increasing awareness of the need of the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Oh, for greater zeal, both for the post-war period and now, in persuading men to yield to the Lordship of Jesus Christ: that our endeavor to make better people will not only aim at the outside, but primarily at the heart. No matter how well this sick world is fixed up externally, men will still have anger, jealousy, malice in their hearts. What the world needs is Jesus. Let everyone who has been born into the Kingdom of God do his utmost to have others share the joy and peace which only comes through Jesus Christ.

O God, renew our strength to make known the Good News of Jesus Christ.

It is far better to admit ignorance than to display it.