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The Holy Spirit and You

By Stanley D. Walters

(Winner of first-place award in the 1957 National Holiness Association Pentecost Sermon Contest.)

The earliest New Testament reference to the coming of the Spirit is couched in terms of baptism. John the Baptist announced, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I; . . . he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." The first mention of the Holy Spirit in Acts is in Christ's own words of promise, "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."

Baptism signifies cleansing. Water is indispensable to cleanliness, and as a symbol, baptism is an outward token of a new, regenerated inner life. Therefore, when the metaphor of baptism is applied to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, cleansing is suggested.

Peter connects the baptism with the Spirit with cleansing. Reporting to his brethren how the Holy Spirit had fallen upon the house of Cornelius, he added, "And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit . . . And God, who knoweth the heart, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us, . . . cleansing their hearts by faith."

What, then, does the Holy Spirit cleanse?

It is an important day in the life of a Christian when he recognizes that he has an inner spiritual need. Earnest Christians are likely to find that the forgiveness of sins does not give them an undivided heart. Sooner or later each man discovers that he is his own enemy—that from within come pressures against the highest will of God.

The inner conflict of the Christian is a conflict of the will of God with personal, selfish interests. The New Testament gives glimpses of such struggles. Paul writes that "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that he cannot do the things that he would" (Gal. 5:17).

The inner spiritual need may represent resistance to certain aspects of God's will. As the Christian life progresses, His will in matters of life become clear to us—too clear, perhaps—and we prefer not to give up cherished habits or attitudes of self. Within the heart, a stiffening against God's will begins to form.

Or, selfishness may show itself by doing the right things for the wrong reasons. It is good to testify of God's goodness to us, but not if it is done to impress people with our piety. It is good to preach fine sermons, but not if our thought is more for personal reputation than for reaching the heart and conscience of the hearer. "He would be a good preacher," someone said, "if he had his I's knocked out."

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We Need Fire!

By Paul S. Rees, D.D.

"I am come to send fire on the earth" (Lu. 12:49). Listening to these words of our Lord we can see the fire of His purpose: "I am come to cast fire."

Our Lord was not afraid to raise issues. He did not shrink from taking sides. He was no tepid teacher of pleasant platitudes. He laid down the truth of God and made claims concerning Himself that compelled men to line up on one side or the other. He insisted that His followers should do more than give a polite intellectual consent to His words. From top to bottom they must be committed to Him and enlisted as the zestful heralds and the passionate practitioners of His truth.

Look again at the words of our Lord and you will see that, besides the flame of His purpose, there is the flame of His passion. I use the word "passion" in its more precise meaning as referring to Christ's suffering and death.

Some have been puzzled by the statement that He makes in the verse following: "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!"

Why should the Master talk about His baptism when He had been baptized by John three years earlier? The answer, of course, is that the word "baptism" does not always stand for water. Here it stands for blood! Here it speaks not of an ordinance but an ordeal. That ordeal was Gethsemane and Calvary.

It was the frightfully expensive way that His holy love had to take in order to light a path of reconciliation over which guilty, condemned, foolish folks like you and me could walk into the waiting, forgiving arms of the Almighty Father.

Crisis And Conquest

It was that quenchless flame of pure, redemptive love that drove Him on, through agony and tears, to the crisis of death and the conquest in resurrection.

What follows is sheer mystery and glory. It is the mystery and glory of that miracle by which common people like ourselves are won over to the Cross. The Cross becomes our "magnificent obsession." We feel as Paul did when he cried to the Corinthians: "We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (II Corinthians 5:14, 15).

"Unto Him!"

"Unto Him!" There you have the secret of great and zestful and impassioned living. "Unto Him!" His Cross has become the altar of your soul where, as in the Holy of Holies of old, the fire never goes out.

"Unto Him" you make your decisions. "Unto Him" you turn over your business. "Unto Him" you dedicate your powers. "Unto Him" you give your unfaltering al-

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