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The Disease of the Church

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When Jesus rose from the dead the whole Church of Christ could assemble in one upper chamber. At the time of His ascension it numbered one hundred and twenty. Of all the ages of history it was the age of universal corruption. Outside of Judea, idolatry reigned supreme. Gods and goddesses, representing every phase of vice, were openly worshiped in magnificent temples and at costly shrines. All power was in the hands of a magnificent and heartless imperialism. They were reproached, reviled, persecuted, and subjected to exile and death.

But those early Christians had the help of an indwelling, sanctifying Saviour and the anointing of the Holy Ghost, and with that equipment they faced a hostile world and all the malignant powers of darkness, and conquered. Within seventy years, according to the smallest estimate, there were half a million followers of Jesus, and some authorities affirm that there were a quarter of a million in the province of Babylon alone. In other words, with Holy Spirit power upon them, they increased more than four thousand fold in threescore years.

It is too much to say or believe that if the Protestant churches and ministry had a similar anointing of Holy Ghost power today, we could take the world for Christ in ten years? We have everything desirable for doing Christian work but the general endowment of Holy Spirit power. But without that, alas, how feeble, comparatively, when measured by that first century, are our Christian triumphs!

If any thoughtful reader should be tempted to accuse me of exaggeration, let him note the testimony of the great souls on the watch-towers of Zion. Fifty years ago that spiritual commentator and theological professor of Oberlin, Prof. Henry Cowles, commenting on the depressed standard of holiness and the consequent confusion and same of the Church, wrote: "Plainly, there is no remedy but for the Church to come back to the very elements of piety. She must return to God and holy communion. The standard of piety must be raised."

"What can the Church do for the conversion of the world, for her own existence even, without personal holiness—much deep, pure, personal holiness. No wonder that a conviction of this truth should have fastened upon discerning minds with painful strength. The standard of piety throughout the American Church is extremely and deplorably low. It is low compared with that of the primitive Church, compared with the provisions of the gospel, with the obligations of redeemed sinners, or with the requisite qualifications for the work to be done. The spirit of the world has deeply pervaded and exceedingly engrossed the heart of the Church."

"Go through the land and estimate her unconsecrated wealth, measure the energy of worldliness and the apathy of love and prayer, for the proof. There is extensively a public sentiment which repels the subject of personal

holiness, hears it named with fear, discusses it with sensitive apprehensions of excess, or even treats it with sarcasm, and, of course, which shields the heart and conscience against the appeal of truth... The responsibilities and privileges of Christians in this life must be clearly exhibited, and mightily urged upon the heart and conscience of the Church."

Dr. Albert Barnes, the commentator, of blessed memory, delivered a discourse in New York City, in which he made the following statement concerning the condition of the churches: "Not one in ten of the membership of our church (Presbyterian) are doing anything effective for the sanctification of believers, or the salvation of sinners." "That utterance was very extensively reported, and never," writes one of wide reading, "was its strict correctness questioned."

Still later Dr. Cuyler wrote: "Too many new converts sit down contented with the fact that they are converted. Born into the kingdom, they are satisfied to remain babies or dwarfs. To make a profession seems to be about the beginning and the end of their religion. They have no spiritual ambition to get beyond their alphabet, and the Church of Christ gains very little more than their useless, uncreditable names on their muster-rolls."

Rev. A. T. Pearson, D.D., said before a Christian Conference in Detroit: "God meant to impress men by the contrast of the unworldliness of his people; but, on the whole, the witness of a separate and sanctified life is gone, and the witness of the tongue of fire is gone with it. The worldliness of the Church is a fact to which we can not with impunity shut our eyes."

Dr. Rice, of Virginia, said: "The work of foreign missions will not advance to any great degree till there is a higher type of piety at home; that it would not consist with the plan of God to diffuse over the world such a low type of piety as prevails among us. In fact, such a sort of piety has but little disposition to diffuse itself: it requires all its vitality and energy to maintain its present position—there is none to spare."

Dwight L. Moody, than whom, probably, no man living was better acquainted with the spiritual condition of the English-speaking world. "Nine-tenths, at least, of the church members never think of speaking for Christ. If they see a man, perhaps a near relative, just going right down to ruin, going rapidly, they never think of speaking to him about his sinful course, and of seeking to win him to Christ. Now certainly there must be something wrong. And yet, when you talk with them, you find they have faith, and you can not say they are not children of God, but they have not the power; they have not the liberty; they have not the love that real disciples of Christ should have."

"A great many people are thinking that we need

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