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Dare We Ask Again?

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A few days ago I was reading that beautiful promise made by Jesus: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13).

Of all God's gifts none is greater than the gift of the Holy Spirit. The outpoured Spirit is referred to as "the promise of the Father"—the chief promise of all. So it is. If parents know how to give good gifts, God knows how to bestow the best gift of all—the Holy Spirit.

Now sinners can only be convicted and regenerated by the Holy Spirit, but nowhere in the Scriptures are sinners bidden to pray for the Holy Spirit. They pray for forgiveness and for sonship—through the Spirit, to be sure. Sinners cannot comprehend asking for God himself to come into their hearts and dwell there. Not until a sinner's heart is regenerated by the Spirit can he ask that his heart become the temple of the Spirit.

The contest of this verse proves that this promise is held out to believers only. Jesus was teaching believers to pray when He gave to them the "Lord's Prayer." The Prayer is addressed to "Our Father." That's the cry of a believer, for sinners cry out, "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). In the parable that follows, Jesus speaks of the man without bread in his house as going to a friend (not a stranger) for bread. Jesus then gave the threefold invitation to prayer and the threefold promise of prayer. Let us quote it from Williams' translation: "So I tell you, keep on asking, and the gift will be given you; keep on seeking, and you will find; keep on knocking, and the door will open to you. For everyone who keeps on asking, receives; and the one who keeps on seeking, finds; and to the one who keeps on knocking, the door will open" (Luke 11:9,10). In a footnote Williams explains that "this continuance in prayer is (indicated) in the present imperatives and present participles (in the Greek), often repeated."

For a couple of centuries it has seemed crystal clear to many Christians, particularly some in the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition, that God's Word instructs believers to pray for the fulness of the Spirit, for the Holy Spirit in the fulness of His grace and gifts. This is the privilege of all Christians. Some have been confused because of the dispensational issue brought up, e.g. by Dr. C. I. Scofield. On Luke II: 13 Scofield informs us that this promise was offered only to pre-Pentecost believers: "To go back to the promise of Luke 11:13 is to forget Pentecost, and to ignore the truth that now every believer has the indwelling Spirit." To erect a high dispensational wall around a precious promise given by the Saviour is unwise, and does not reflect the use of the Scriptures by Jesus or Paul. True, the Holy Spirit does indwell every believer (Rom. 8:9). but all believers have not yet asked for the

Holy Spirit nor have all been filled with the Spirit.

It is the believer's privilege and duty to be filled with the Spirit. A privilege becomes a duty when that privilege involves Christian maturity and Christian service. To be what we ought to be and to do what we ought to do, requires that we ask for the Spirit in His fulness. This is the strong emphasis of the "second blessing, properly so called," to use John Wesley's phrase. Many of us can testify that the Spirit brought us to a place where we felt the great urgency to be emptied of self and to be filled with the Spirit. Thank God, that is never a vain quest. For the God who cannot lie has promised, through His Son, that "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). Many thousands of Christians can testify to the coming of the Spirit in His fulness. (Read about "George Mueller's Second Conversion" in the May 17 issue of THE WESLEYAN METHODIST).

With that infilling comes an inward assurance of peace and purity, and outward signs of power for living and witnessing. But that crisis filling was never meant to be marked only as a glorious experience or a long-to-be-remembered dateline. It was meant rather to be the threshold to a deeper life in God, a life of the fulness of the Spirit. Because thereafter a person by faith in the risen Christ may live and work in the realm of the Spirit's fulness.

Does this crisis filling mean that never again will we pray, or need to pray, to be filled with the Spirit? Some have thought so and have been living a life of spiritual impoverishment.

Does this crisis filling mean that a fresh infilling of the Spirit is only to be asked after a person has backslidden or when he yearns for a revival among God's people? Oh, no. This hungering and thirsting for righteousness is not a once-for-all matter. Living things become hungry and thirsty and must eat and drink repeatedly, frequently. So is every one that is born of the Spirit. No one has so keen an "appetite" for the Spirit as he who has tasted of that fulness. To seek new infillings is a sign of healthy spiritual life.

Read again Luke 11:13, as Williams has so aptly translated the Greek verbals: "How much more surely will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who continue to ask him?" Note Jesus' assurance is given to those "who continue to ask Him." As I write these lines there is a strong yearning in my heart for a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Ps. 42:1). That exactly describes my desire.

Then I recall Paul's words in Ephesians 5:18. Again Williams translates much more accurately the present

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