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EFFICIENCY
in the Service of God



Barclay F. Buxton

EFFICIENCY

in the Service of God
through the Baptism of
the Holy Ghost

by

BARCLAY F. BUXTON

CHRISTIAN LITERATURE CRUSADE

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INTRODUCTION

THE following pages on the need, the promise, and the gift of the Holy Ghost to those who are in Christ were addressed, in the first place, to the missionaries of all Protestant denominations in Japan. They are now published in England, with much prayer that they may lead some, who only theologically know about the Holy Ghost, to seek a personal knowledge of Him who alone can make us strong and successful soldiers of the Cross.

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The Promise

THE CONDITION—

Wait for the promise of the Father (Acts 1: 4).

THE CERTAIN RESULT—

Ye shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost (v. 5).

THE EFFECT—

Ye shall receive power (v. 8).

SUCH is the promise of the Lord Jesus to His Church. Such is His expectation, and hope, and desire for each redeemed one. Just as His purpose towards a sinner is that he “have redemption through His blood” (Eph. 1: 7) so His purpose towards a saint is that he may be filled with the Holy Ghost. As we urge sinners to be saved, so let us urge the unsatisfied people of God to be filled with the Holy Ghost.

We all know how the early disciples laid hold of these promises with strong faith and determination. Are we doing so? We know how gloriously the promise of the Father was fulfilled in them. Has God fulfilled it to us? We need have no doubt as to whether He has or not. The change wrought by the baptism of the Holy Ghost is so marked and supernatural that anyone can tell whether he has received or not.

The abundant fulfilment of the promise that God gave to these disciples encourages us not to rest until we have obtained the same blessing. Let us go over with unprejudiced minds the story of how the early disciples received the Holy Ghost. By this we can get a clear understanding of what God promises to do, and of how we can get Him to do it for us. By seeing how ready God is to baptise any individual soul with the Holy Ghost our own eager longings for that blessing will be stirred up, and

our faith strengthened to ask and accept this great gift.

Let us draw near to this deeply momentous subject in a humble, teachable spirit. Let us lay aside our own ideas, and the excuses by which we have silenced our consciences in the past with regard to it. Let us accept no one else's opinion, and certainly not that of the writer of this booklet. But let us believe that God is ready to lead seeking souls into all the blessings He has for them; and therefore take up this attitude:—

“I will hear what God the Lord will say unto me.”

And whatever He does say, let us be prepared to accept it at all costs.

The Vital Need

CHRIST was going to leave His little Church. His personal presence had been their joy, and delight, and glory. And more than that, He had brought them near to God. He had given them power over all the power of the enemy. He had guided and instructed them. He had been their comforter in persecution, their example in daily life, their strength in trial. His word and His example had been constant fuel to their zeal for the Kingdom of God. And yet they were soon to be bereft of Him, who was now their all in all.

Fiery trial awaited them. The world, the flesh, and the devil would do their utmost against them. The world had persecuted their Lord because He testified against it. It would persecute them if they testified against it; or it would try to modify their testimony. The flesh had been strong in them whilst their Lord had been with them. How much more would it prevail now? Satan would do his utmost to stamp out the Kingdom of God. How could that little Church hope

to be successful against such odds ?

We are exactly in the same position. The same dangers confront us. The same mighty foes are sure to attack all who range themselves under Christ's banner and really mean wholeheartedly to bear His name in this world. The enemy is just as cruel, as clever and as strong now as he was in the first century. Is it possible to stand our ground ? Can we be victorious ? When we remember Satan's power and resources, is it not utterly absurd to think of continuous victory ?

May we not as well settle down, as most Christians do, with the expectation of frequent defeat ? Well might we do so if we looked only at the power of our enemy. But looking to our Lord Jesus, who can fill us with divine power, we have no right to expect anything but continuous victory.

Christ expected His Church not merely to hold their own, but actively to push His cause until the kingdoms of this world had become the Kingdom of His Father. He expected them to make successful inroads into the kingdom of Satan, that precious souls might be saved from his power. He expected them boldly to march on for the salvation of the world in spite of all that the priests and rulers could do to stop them. And He expects it of us who form His Church now. The fact, that for 1,900 years Christians have failed in urging on the Kingdom of God and have allowed souls to rush on to hell unwarned, is no excuse for us to do the same. We must go back to apostolical Christianity in its supernatural power. Christ expects of us, as He did of them, that we will make it our first business in this world to rescue sinners, and He moreover expects us so to work that we shall be successful in their rescue.

But how could this be ? Surely the more we think of the situation the more we must be convinced that Christ has somehow miscalculated, and been mistaken, in leaving 120 disciples to conquer the world for Him. They had no natural powers to effect this. They were not men of position, wealth, learning or influence. Most of them were working men and women. In their own land they had against them all the power of the

priests through whom their Lord had been crucified, and who would probably crucify them too if they pressed His Kingdom upon public notice. And yet Judæa was their most hopeful sphere of work. Beyond that lay Greece and Rome, with the power of their rulers and the antiquity of their established religions. But Christ expected His disciples to conquer these also for Him.

In these days we have the same worldly powers against us. Worldly customs, worldly religions strong in their antiquity, satanic powers and fleshly lusts rule over the vast majority of human beings. Yet Christ expects us to set them free (Isa. 49: 9). He expects us to make His Kingdom victorious (Dan. 2: 44). He has wrought out a marvellous salvation for these souls at infinite cost. He has entrusted it to us, and He expects us to make it effective amongst men, in spite of all devilish and fleshly opposition. Has He not made a mistake? Has He not miscalculated our powers, and expected too much of us, or underestimated the strength of our foes?

No! His calculations are accurate. It can be done! Souls can be saved! The victory is secure to us! Satan's kingdom shall be destroyed! And this is the secret of the victory—which has too long been left out of our calculations, though it was the hope and basis of Christ's—

YE SHALL RECEIVE POWER, AFTER THAT THE HOLY GHOST
IS COME UPON YOU.

Here is divine, omnipotent, victorious power. Without it, it is folly to think that we can be successful as Christian workers. With it success is certain. I ask you, a Christian, "has He yet come upon you?" It is a question of life or death to precious souls about you. Do not dare to rest until you have the assurance that God has given you what He means by the "Holy Ghost coming upon you."

The Remedy

EVERYONE who undertakes Christian work is setting out to make war upon a king who is almost almighty. We may well sit down first and consult whether our resources are sufficient to carry on the warfare successfully (Luke 14: 31); for Christian workers who fail in the great end of their ministry—the salvation of others from the power of Satan—are really a hindrance in the victorious progress of the gospel.

If the enemy has all but almighty power, we shall not prevail unless we have almighty power at our disposal. No wonder the parting message of the Lord Jesus to His little Church was, “Tarry ye at Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high.” Not to them only is the command given. It comes down to us with living power and force. Let any Christian beware of disobeying it !

Yet many do disobey it, and plunge into Christian work before they have been baptised with the Holy Ghost. And they seem to be justified in doing so. Might not the early disciples in eager haste have said, “Lord, sinners are dying and going to hell. We are saved and can point out the way to them. Surely Thou dost not mean us to tarry ?” And if the Lord had said, “You have not yet the divine equipment,” might they not have answered, “What more do we need ? Have we not had personal intercourse for months with Thee ? Do we not know Thy teaching ? Have we not seen Thy miracles ? Have we not by Thy Spirit experienced the new birth ? And more—did we not see Thee suffer, and do we not know that by Thy death was made full atonement for our sins ? Were we not witnesses of Thy resurrection ? Have we not seen Thee in Thy risen body ? Hast Thou not opened our understanding to understand the Scriptures ? Have we not received Thy com-

mandments concerning Thy Kingdom (Acts 1: 2) ? What further equipment can we need for preaching the Gospel ? ”

No ! These things are all very essential, but they do not equip for preaching the Gospel. These are like dynamite and fuse, harmless against the kingdom of Satan until the fire is applied. The disciples, having all these things, yet had to tarry until they were baptised with the Holy Ghost and fire.

Have we taken this to heart ? If it means anything, it means that the experience of God's salvation, the knowledge of the Bible, a lengthened experience of Christian life, a zeal for the Lord are not enough to qualify a man to extend the kingdom and to win souls. These are essential for a soul-winner, but these give him none of the divine power that his divine work needs. Let him, who has not yet received, tarry before the Lord, till he has received “ the crown of the anointing oil of his God ” (Lev. 21: 12).

Then will be fulfilled Christ's purpose to the world, that, though He the one Anointed One has gone away, there remain in the world many anointed ones; and upon each one of these rests a double portion (see the type in 2 Kings 2: 9-11) of His Spirit, by whom they live as He lived (1 John 2: 6), speak as He spoke, and work as He worked (John 14: 12). Only by His power could they be successful fishers of men; and by the same means only can we be the blessing in this world that Christ purposed that His disciples should be.

What is Promised ?

THESE disciples were clearly informed of the blessing that the Holy Ghost would be to them. If we would claim any blessing from the Lord, it is of importance that we should intelligently understand what He covenants to give. It is only when we clearly realise this that our hearts hunger and thirst for it, and our faith will be encouraged and strengthened to lay hold of God. Then we can pray with power because we understand and eagerly desire that for which we pray, for prayer that brings down the blessing (Ezek. 36: 37) must state definitely the needs of the one who prays (Mark 10: 51).

These disciples had the Old Testament in their hands and the words of the Lord Jesus in their remembrance. From these two sources they could gather a complete idea of what the Comforter would be to them. From these two sources let us see what they probably expected. Their expectations stirred them up to seek and obtain this blessing. May our hearts also be stirred as we ponder these rich and full promises.

In Character

Taking the Old Testament we see many direct promises of the baptism of the Holy Ghost, which speak of its glorious effects in men's hearts. For instance, we are told in Isaiah 32: 13-18, that the Comforter brings fruitfulness, righteousness, and peace to the heart that before was full of the thorns and briars of sin (v. 13), and the wild beasts of carnal lusts (v. 14). Reading Isaiah 44, we see that the outpouring of the Spirit (v. 3) brings vigour into spiritual life (v. 4) and boldness in testimony (v. 5). From Ezek. 36 we gather that one cleansed (v. 25) and filled with the Spirit (v. 27) has power to obey God and do His will. We are told in Joel (2: 28) that where the Spirit is outpoured, there will be bold preaching of the gospel by men and women,

and revelation of spiritual things will be given.

Would not such glorious certainties be enough in themselves to spur us on to obtain this blessing ? All these promises can be fulfilled now in us (2 Cor. 1: 20).

In Action

But we have more than this. Those early disciples would be sure to remember the power and success of the lives of those men upon whom the Spirit came. By the Holy Ghost, Moses had boldly stood before Pharaoh, giving him God's message, and had successfully led a whole nation out of slavery to the borders of Canaan (Ex. 3: 12, Num. 11: 17). By His power Samson had been more than conqueror (Judges 13: 25, 14: 6, 15: 14). By Him David had sung, and fought, and ruled (1 Sam. 16: 13). By Him Elijah had had power to shut heaven, and also to open it in blessing upon the whole land. By the fulness of the Holy Ghost many others had become workers and conquerors for God, and deliverers and inspirers of others. By this Spirit prophets saw into the sin and misery about them; but clearly saw also the coming Saviour, who could save from sin, and abundantly make up for all that sin had wrought.

The experience of these men might well encourage us to seek the same blessing. And it gives us more than encouragement. For, if the Spirit was thus in large measure poured out upon individuals in the Old Testament dispensation, how much more will God give Him to us who live in the dispensation of the Holy Ghost ?

The same Spirit who had wrought so effectually and so mightily in the old saints was promised to the disciples. With what joy and hope their hearts must have bounded when they grasped the promise that the Spirit, whereby these saints of old worked, and fought, and spoke, and endured, should come in overflowing measure upon them. The same prospect is before anyone now who will stir himself up to seek. Has such a prospect caused my heart to bound with joyful hope and determination to obtain the fulfilment of such rich promises ?

But they had (and we too have) not only the Old Testament, but the words of Christ Himself, telling what the baptism of the Holy Ghost is to them that receive.

This was the chief subject of our Lord's last words to them. He was trying to stir their hearts about the Holy Ghost, even as He does the hearts of His people now, that they might seek and be willing to part with all they had, to obtain this choicest gift of God. His words were the clearest and the deepest on this subject. If we would get a correct idea of the influence of the coming of the Holy Ghost to abide in any heart, we must turn to His words and learn what He led His disciples to expect. He explained that the personal indwelling presence of the Holy Ghost could only be received by those who had been born again by His power (John 14: 17). This text shows us that this is a blessing for Christians to seek after their conversion.

His Character and Power

He spoke of His character and power in the four names under which He spoke of the Holy Ghost.

1. *The Holy Spirit*. This name shows that He has access to our spirits and will be able to carry on His sanctifying work there at the centre of our life (v. 26).
2. *The Comforter*, because He is going to be to us what Christ had been to the disciples (see the word "another," John 14: 16), and even a closer and more constant Companion, Guide, and Strength.
3. *The Spirit of Truth*, giving us truth in our inward parts ("shall be in you," John 14: 17), showing more and more of Christ (15: 26), and opening the Word to us, so that we understand spiritual truth (16: 13).
4. *The Promise of the Father* (Acts 1: 4), because the Comforter is the fulfilment of the greatest of the promises of God, which is that He should dwell in us and be our God.

In His Work in and through us

Christ also showed them what the action of the Spirit would be upon their hearts. He is first of all to baptise (Acts 1: 5),

and then continuously to abide in the heart (John 14: 16) that He has cleansed. The Christian would experience four great effects. 1. Spiritual knowledge and understanding (John 14: 26). 2. He would become a source of life, and gladness, and power to all about him (John 7: 38, 39). 3. He would have power in word (Acts 1: 8), so that sinners would be convicted (John 16: 8); and if he was brought up for judgment he would be taught what to say (Luke 12: 12), and say it with irresistible power (Luke 21: 15). 4. He would have power in deed (John 14: 12) so that signs and wonders would accompany his ministry. The Lord showed that He meant us to expect all these promises to be fulfilled literally in our experience, for otherwise His statement would not be fulfilled, that the Comforter, abiding in our hearts, would be even better than His own personal presence in physical form on earth (John 16: 7).

The Way to Receive

Christ told them and us how we might receive this priceless gift. (1) He is given as a free gift (Luke 11: 13) to those who believe this promise of the Father and ask for Him. Christ joins His prayers to ours when we seek as He requires (John 14: 15, 16). (2) He is given to those who love and obey Him (14: 15), and (3) who are willing to wait on the Lord in confident faith and obedience to His word (Luke 24: 49).

The Way illustrated

Christ summed up all this teaching by the object lesson of John 20: 19-23, which He has repeated again and again whenever souls receive the Comforter. He still comes into the midst in resurrection power (v. 19), revealing His sacrifice (v. 20), and leading His people to yield themselves to His service (v. 21). Then upon them He breathes the Holy Ghost (v. 22), telling them to receive Him, so that they may have power to offer forgiveness of sins to sin-laden hearts (v. 23).

Such was the blessing the Lord led His disciples to expect. The Baptism of the Holy Ghost is just the same to us as to them. As they heard these promises, little wonder that these disciples

were prepared to wait until they received. What cause for wonder there is that, though this promise of the Father can still be obtained by any believing soul, so few seek and obtain. Shall it be so any longer in my case ?

Three Definitions

All these promises are summed up in three names which are given to this blessing at the beginning of the Acts. It is called—

1. A Baptism, i.e., a washing (Acts 1: 5), which gives a clean heart (Ps. 51: 10, Ezk. 36: 26, Acts 15: 9). It is contrasted here, and in four other places (Matt. 3: 11, Mark 1: 8, Luke 3: 16, John 1: 33) in which this promise is given, with the baptism of John. John's baptism cleansed only the outer man and his outer life. This baptism makes the inner man clean, and the inner life holy, by cleansing away heart-sin.

2. It is called an Enduement (Acts 1: 8), which brings power for service; so that the word of the Lord in our mouths is as a hammer that breaks hearts, and as a fire that melts them. It brings grace to uplift the cross of the Lord Jesus—

Till its drawing power is felt,
And ten thousands of poor sinners
At His footstool shall have knelt.

3. It is called a Filling (Acts 2: 4), which results in there being no room in the life for anyone but Him. He takes the whole being under His control, and from the throne of the heart becomes the Lord and life of the will, the mind, the desires, the affections, the motives, and the passions. In such a man the Lord Jesus tells us that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit dwell (John 14: 23, 20, 17); and he may have fellowship with them (1 John 1: 3). He experiences the constraining power of divine love. He rejoices with joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. He has a peace that passes understanding. And his fiery zeal constrains him at all times to seek the lost, and lead them to the Saviour.

Such is the blessing offered to all. God's desire and counsel and command to us is to enter in and possess all this glorious inheritance. Shall I obey ?

Shall We Seek or Not?

WE have seen that the disciples knew the promises, and understood them enough to know that God would give them an inestimable blessing on certain conditions. They must have understood also that, whereas in former times God had chosen out certain men and filled them with the Holy Ghost, now He was preparing to pour out His Spirit on all flesh; and that whosoever wished might come and share in the outpouring. How many Christians now have got just as far as that ! By Bible study, sermons, reading, and from the testimony of others, they clearly understand that God is willing to pour out His Spirit upon them. They know also that now is the dispensation of the Holy Ghost. And it may be they have understood all that for some time. But they have not yet apprehended this gift for themselves. Perhaps they have in some measure sought. But they have not sought with all their hearts, or most certainly they would have found. And so they are still without that which would make their lives holy, joyous, and powerful for the Lord and man. Is this your condition ?

This was the condition of the disciples just after the ascension. There were over 500 of them (I Cor. 15: 6). These were all "brethren." They had been born again into the family of the Lord Jesus. They were not of the world, for the world was not to see (John 14: 19) the Lord Jesus after His resurrection. They had heard that last command from the Lord Himself, "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high." Surely they will obey it ! Surely they will let nothing hinder them from receiving the fulness of the Holy Ghost ! Surely, with such a prize in view, they will gladly lay aside all else for a while, in order to seek according to the Lord's command.

So we might have thought. But, sad to say, one hundred

and twenty of them only, under a quarter, stayed in Jerusalem to obey that last command (Acts 1: 15). Where had the rest gone? Doubtless back to their own homes to live quiet, peaceful, Christian lives, as many do now; thinking of the Lord, loving Him, and talking of Him to others; perhaps actively working for Him. But they had **NOT RECEIVED THE POWER!**

And probably, as they were disobeying God in not tarrying, they never would receive it later.

Doubtless they had what they thought good excuses for not obeying God. The home concerns of one, and the business of another, required their presence. One did not see why he could not receive God's great gift anywhere, without tarrying in Jerusalem. Another could not bear the scorn to which he would be subjected if he were thus to obey the extraordinary command of a crucified Man. Another might say, "I am saved, and I know the sort of life Christ wants me to live. What can I need more?" And if the heart of another had been known, you would have seen that he did not want to be so out-and-out a Christian as he knew this fiery baptism would make him. So, soothing their consciences by such feeble excuses, they did not tarry for the Holy Ghost as they were commanded.

Excuses are still easy to find. But do they really excuse you from waiting for the promise of the Father, and being baptised with the Holy Ghost? What can excuse you being joyless, when you might be exultant? unclean, when you might be clean? cold in heart, when you might be full and overflowing with love and zeal? weak, when you might be mighty as a valiant soldier of the cross? Some of us have been long enough in company with those 380 disciples who did not seek the baptism. Let us shake off the past with its failures and sins, that cling to us and clog us in pressing forward at once! Let us arise with holy determination. Let us prove God! Let us see whether there be any Holy Ghost or not! Cost what it may—suffering, ignominy, death—we must, we will be men and women **FULL OF THE HOLY GHOST.**

Waiting

ONE quarter of the whole number of disciples were prepared to believe their Lord, and to seek until they had obtained what He promised. Let us be amongst their number, and join them in their search, and in obtaining the blessing. Let us learn from them what real "waiting upon the Lord" is.

They returned to Jerusalem (Luke 24: 52), although their Lord had been crucified there and they might be also. Yet, in confident expectation of what the Lord had promised to do, they enter, not in fear of the Jews, nor in sorrow for their departed Lord, but with "great joy". If we have in faith really grasped the promise of the Father, we too shall begin to wait upon Him in joyous, confident expectation that we may receive the fulness that has been promised.

They met together in the upper room. Their Lord was not amongst them as He used to be. But the ascension scene is still in their hearts. They now know Jesus as the Exalted One. They realise that He has taken His seat on the right hand of God, and is there as their great High Priest to plead for them to the Father. For the first time they are praying in His Name. And they have confident faith that whatever they ask in that Name they will receive (John 14: 13).

Considering an Ascended Lord

Do we know our Lord as the Ascended One, to whom all power is given? Only when we do so shall we obtain the Holy Ghost. Just as it is only as we know Christ crucified that our sins are pardoned, so only as we know Christ risen do we walk in resurrection power and life; and only as we know Christ ascended do we receive the Holy Ghost (Acts 2: 33, Ps. 68: 18).

Knowing that their Brother, their Master, and their Saviour

was at the right hand of power, they met together. They had only one aim—to obtain this baptism. Nothing less would satisfy them. Let nothing less satisfy us. We meet together and enjoy communion with the saints, and deepen our knowledge of the Bible. But let us not be satisfied with this, or with anything less than what God means by the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Only those who have this before them will obtain Him.

Willing to Obey Him

Many of us are willing to wait before the Lord in a spirit of faith and obedience whatever the cost to find His blessing. For assuredly it will cost us something. Though the Spirit is the free gift of God, we shall not receive Him until the hindrances within have been put away. And often this means bitter spiritual suffering, and a real fellowship with Christ in the experience of Gethsemane. But if we see the deep importance of obtaining this promise, we shall be willing to purge ourselves, “by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning” (Isa. 4: 4), from all sin (2 Cor. 7: 1). Even though that sin may be as precious and as important to us as a right hand or a right eye, we shall cast it from us if it is hindering us from becoming partakers of the Holy Ghost. We shall find our hearts and wills have been brought to this, through having studied and prayed over the Scriptures about our ascended Lord and the gift of the Holy Ghost, as did the disciples. We shall be willing for the suffering, because we know the glory will follow.

Ready to Serve Him

But those who are thus consecrated will also look on into the future, and be ready to do His will at all times and in all circumstances. The disciples did so, as we read at the end of Acts 1. They realised that the affairs of the kingdom of heaven were in their hands, and that they were responsible for its extension (Acts 1: 8). They were prepared to spend their lives in the salvation of sinners, and in bearing the cross before the world.

We see this, because even whilst waiting on the Lord they filled up the gap in the ranks of the apostles caused by the fall of one, and thus were ready to begin their work when the Spirit was given. Is my life thus yielded to God for Him to use in the salvation of the world? It is only such who receive. The fulness of the Holy Ghost is not given merely that we may have happy and comfortable feelings, or live in a spiritually exultant state of mind. He is given that we may be strong to bear the cross before men, and live for Christ instead of ourselves. Who, then, is willing to consecrate his service thus fully and utterly to his Lord?

Repentance as Christians

But, more than this, let us seek in a spirit of self-abasement and repentance for past sin, and weakness, and failure. Whilst we have been sleeping, others have been passing on to hell. There are some whom we might have warned, but had not the courage to do so, and their blood is required of us (Ezek. 33: 6). There are some whom we have warned in a feeble way that has not resulted in their turning from sin to God (Jer. 23: 22). We have often had no joy in the Lord, no love for Him and for souls, and trouble and conflict instead of peace in our hearts. If we would come to the Lord, seeking the fulness of the Holy Ghost, we must come confessing these sins of our Christian life and with hearty repentance claim grace never to fall into them again.

Their United Preparation

And so they began to seek. No doubt they would meet together in a very simple manner. Their meetings would doubtless consist chiefly in prayer (Acts 1: 14), in which both the men and the women lead. They evidently talked over the Scriptures a good deal, and naturally turned to the passages that prophesied Christ's resurrection and ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. We see from St. Peter's address, in chapter 2, that these subjects were much on his mind, so that probably they had been the theme of conversation. Besides

this, they would be sure to speak of Christ's promise of the Holy Ghost, which had caused them to come together. We know that they were used to hymn singing (Matt. 26: 30) when they met together, and we may be sure that they did not omit that practice now. A time of spiritual refreshing in the Church has always been accompanied by an outburst of new songs to the Lord. So they may have composed and sung special hymns pleading for the Holy Ghost. Thus, moved by the same spirit of prayer and praise as we are, would they wait for the coming of the Comforter ! And all this time they were united in bonds of accord (Acts 1: 14, 2: 1), and union, and love. They were of one heart and of one soul in seeking the blessing. They were all desperately in earnest about it. There were no divisions, no doubts or fears amongst some disciples, no cold-heartedness in others. These would most assuredly have hindered the full manifestation of the Holy Ghost. They were "dwelling together in unity," so "the Lord commanded the blessing." From the head of their High Priest flowed down the holy oil to them who were at the "skirts of His garment" (compare Luke 8: 44, and Ps. 133) and the dew of the Holy Ghost rested blessedly upon them.

By Faith and Patience

And so the days went by. Each morning, in joyful hope, they would expect the outpouring on that day. And yet days went by, and they had received nothing. In their faith and eagerness it is likely that they followed Christ's example, and spent one or two of the nights, as well as days, in prayer. But some days had passed, and nothing had as yet resulted. Were they disappointed? No; God was trying their faith, and proving that it was pure. He still very often deals with seeking souls in the same way. He seems to be turning a deaf ear to them, as He did to the Syro-Phœnician woman, but He is only testing their desire and their faith. Here it is that many seeking souls turn back. Their faith and longing have failed because God has kept them waiting a day or two. And too often they

take back the untrue report, "There is no baptism to be had. God does not mean us to think there is."

But let us remember that the time of seeking is sure to be a time of trial. Satan is alive to the tremendous power that a Spirit-baptised soul has against him and his kingdom. He will do his best to hinder a seeking soul from finding the Spirit by tempting him in subtle ways, while he waits on God. Unless we are alive to his devices we may be turned aside from receiving the Spirit. Doubtless he tempted these waiting disciples just as he tempts us now. And so, after a few days' waiting, he may suggest to you, "I have done all I could; I must not force God. Had I not better go home now, and let Him bestow this in His own good time?"

To another he may suggest doubts whether, after all, the Comforter would be given him.

To another he may suggest, "Is it not time to exercise accepting faith? Ought I to believe that I have received, and so go home?"

And as feelings naturally become stirred from so many meetings we may feel nearer to God than before, and Satan may suggest, "This stirring of our feelings is the baptism promised. There is nothing more."

But the disciples knew God would abundantly make good His promise. As yet they had received nothing that could be what God meant by a baptism of the Holy Ghost.

Have you?

In these temptations they were more than conquerors. It was true they were kept waiting longer than they had expected. But, though the vision tarried, they would wait for it (Hab. 2: 3). They were in earnest. They would hold on until they received. Their hearts craved the fulness of Christ's promise, and each day brought them nearer the glorious outpouring of its fulfilment, each prayer in faith was used of God to complete the preparation of their whole being for His Coming (Eph. 3: 16, 17).

Receiving

THE tenth day was the Feast of Pentecost. The return of this great annual feast would stir the heart of every Jew, and make him feel the influence of its spirit. In the same way the return of Christmas or Easter influences our hearts. The waiting disciples were no exception to this. If we would understand their state of mind just before receiving the Comforter, we must see what were the main ideas connected with the feast. And if we wish to share in the outpouring of the Spirit, let us share in the spirit of the Feast of Pentecost.

From Deut. 16: 9-12, we can gather the feelings that would stir the heart of every pious Jew on that day.

In the first place each worshipper was to bring "a freewill offering," which he was to give to the Lord his God. The Pentecost of the Holy Ghost demands this also. What is to be our freewill offering? Our Lord said (John 14: 15, 16), "If ye love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray . . . the Comforter may abide with you for ever." Our freewill offering then is a heart of love and a will ready to obey. How easy it is to sing piously songs of full surrender to God! And yet how few of those who sing them really do make such a freewill offering to their God. Those who do are henceforth not their own. They will love Him so truly that they will listen for God's voice continually, in order to do His will at all costs. Their lives will be given for the salvation of others from the power of Satan. They are going to be as fruitful as possible to their Lord. Can I make a freewill offering of myself to the Lord in this manner? Well may I do so! He has redeemed me with His precious blood. I will lay my redeemed life at His feet for Him to use as He sees best.

Secondly, this freewill offering was not to be made in a spirit

of hard sacrifice, but "Thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God." If we believe God, we will rejoice; for we know that He will fulfil to us His promise of the Spirit. If we love God, we will rejoice to be His more truly, and to be brought into closer fellowship with Him. The disciples sought for the Spirit with great joy (Luke 24: 52). Let seeking disciples now take care not to fail in this.

Thirdly, our offering to the Lord must be coupled with love to others. "Thou, . . . and thy servant, the Levite, . . . and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow," were all to be drawn together to keep the feast. If you are offering yourself to God, take care that you are at peace with all men (Matt. 5: 24). And seek to have the spirit of love that will, if possible, draw others to serve and worship God with us. He, who has love, is ready to receive the abundant fulness of the Holy Spirit of love.

Lastly, the spirit of this feast was one of humility. "Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt." They knew that it was by His grace alone that they were what they were, and that all God was giving them was undeserved on their part. Do we realise this? The one who feels himself good enough to be filled with the Spirit has not yet come through God's necessary preparatory work (such as the disciples experienced in Acts 1) which gives a humble and contrite heart, that God can bless with His richest gift. But he, who humbly acknowledges that he deserves in himself nothing but hell-fire, and that whatever he does receive is by the free mercy of God, is in a position to be baptised with the Holy Ghost. Seek to be found in this state of humility!

This Spirit of the feast was filling the hearts of the disciples. They must have met early on that morning, for a good deal happened by 9 o'clock (chap 2: 15). They were all with one accord in one place, sitting, with expectant hearts, waiting the coming Comforter. The Lord, whom they sought, did not disappoint them. They were ready for Him, and He was ready for them. Suddenly the rushing of a mighty wind was heard.

The house was peculiarly filled with the power and presence of God. They were all awed and thrilled as God drew near. He was manifesting Himself in the exceeding greatness of His power. They were feeling the inexpressible calm and the unspeakable joy of being face to face with Him. They now knew His majesty. They felt His stirring force. But the great strong wind (1 Kings 19: 11) of His power was not the baptism of the Holy Ghost to them.

Let us not be mistaken for ourselves. We may at times have felt the presence and power of God Himself in a specially deep and impressive way, and yet not be baptised with the Holy Ghost. It has had no lasting effect on our lives. The feeling of awe and solemnity has gradually faded away. We have been near God, but He has not come as a Refining Fire to abide in our hearts.

Yet that more general manifestation of God's presence may be accompanied by the baptism of the Holy Ghost coming to individuals also. So it was here.

Each one of them personally was filled. "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost." The Comforter had come ! God had fulfilled His Word ! All their hopes were gloriously realised ! All their prayers were abundantly answered ! Their hearts were fully satisfied ! God had manifested Himself to them. They felt they knew Him so nearly and so personally, that they could not but call Him Father (Gal. 4: 6). They knew Christ far more really than they had known Him when with Him in the flesh. The Light so filled their hearts and minds that they began to understand His love to them, His teaching, and what He had done for them. And as they fully realised these things, they could not but speak out aloud the wonderful works of God (Acts 2: 11). So is everyone that is full of the Holy Ghost.

The tongue of fire was the symbol of aggressive conquering Christianity, such as our Lord promised when He said, "After that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, ye shall be witnesses unto Me, . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth." Where a

Christian has received the Holy Ghost he will praise the Lord aloud (v. 11). He cannot be silent, for the word of the Lord is as a fire in his bones (Jer. 20: 9). He has the sharp sword (Rev. 19: 15) which penetrates the hearts of men by living words, melting even as it pierces. His words are words of fire (Jer. 5: 14), which devour His hearers, so that they must either be melted, or hate and attack Him. Of old the way to the Tree of Life had been closed by a flaming sword, turning every way (Gen. 3: 24), in the hands of God's servants. Now the tongue of fire was to open out the way whereby every sinner might be brought to the cross, the gospel Tree of Life.

But the baptism of fire brings not only power, but love. Divine fire is nothing else than pure love. The Holy Ghost opens one's eyes to see the lost perishing condition of unsaved souls, and fills one's heart with love that constrains one to go and seek to save them. And this love will be victorious. For love is the power that melts the hearts of men. Love alone can draw sinners to Him against whom they have sinned. Love alone can show them something of God in this world. If we would be fishers of men, our hearts must be filled with this pure, glowing, divine fire of love.

And we may be filled ! The Holy One of Israel does come with fire to our hearts even now ! The way He dealt with those early disciples proves that He has power to turn poor sinners into flames of fire (Heb. 1: 7) by the Holy Ghost. The baptism of fire may be an accomplished fact in our experience, and not merely the theme of an oft-repeated but unanswered prayer.

Have I had a personal Pentecost ? Is the fire really kindled in my soul ? Does it constrain me with love to dying, perishing souls ? Have I this heart-likeness to Christ ? Hallelujah ! if Christ has thus baptised me ! But if not,

TARRY . . . AND " YE SHALL BE BAPTISED WITH THE
HOLY GHOST NOT MANY DAYS HENCE."

The Spirit Offered to All

THERE are always two classes amongst those who witness the effects upon others of a baptism of the Holy Ghost. Some will honestly but wonderingly ask, "What meaneth this?" (Acts 2: 12), and will humbly seek to understand the cause. Others will not be inclined to believe in the mighty working of the living God in this age; and will easily suggest a natural cause for the extraordinary effects (v. 13). If a man is full of the Holy Ghost, they will ascribe his power in preaching to intellectual ability, and his fire to natural zeal, and his deep longing for the salvation of others to the school of thought in which he has lived. But let us have eyes to recognise the Holy Ghost. These other things are good, but the Holy Ghost gives a power, and a fire, and a discernment that other things can never pretend to give.

Peter hears what is being said, and it stirs him up. He rises to speak in all the glow of a fresh baptism of the Holy Ghost. His words are full of power. The mystery of God's will has been made known to him, and he sees that this gift of the Spirit is for all. He proves this with such authority, and shows them the way to obtain Him with such clearness, that this chapter is the best guide-book to souls seeking to be endued with spiritual power. Let us stand with those people of Jerusalem, and listen to what he has to say to us.

The little Church of 120 men and women, full of the Holy Ghost, forms the text of his address. The sight of them prepares the hearts of the hearers to hear his word. Such a Church now is the most melting and convincing argument to others that God can indwell and possess the hearts of men.

He begins by saying that the blessing they have received is nothing more than might have been expected from God's promises. He had promised, "In the last days I will pour out

My Spirit," Now He had accomplished it. A new dispensation had begun, and Pentecost was a specimen of how mightily God was going to work in it. God never limited the outpouring of the Spirit to one day. He promised that He should be poured forth "in those days," that is, on many days. Pentecost is one of many such days that God has given, and will give.

Of every such outpouring there will be five results (Acts 2: 17-21)—

1. Men and women will be inspired and enabled by the Holy Ghost to preach, and to praise, and to pray (vv. 18, 47; 3: 1).

2. Others will have such a spirit of revelation that they will have light about God and about the spiritual life (v. 17, Eph. 1: 17, Ezek. 1: 1).

3. Others will be warned by God in dreams of things not seen as yet (v. 17).

4. Wonders and signs (vv. 19, 20) will be seen and done. The precious blood of Christ, the fire of the Spirit, the smoke of God's presence will be manifested.

5. Sinners will ask and receive salvation (v. 21).

But how can such a promise be fulfilled? How can the Holy Spirit of the living God dwell in defiled hearts, and hold fellowship with men who are at enmity against God?

Before this can come to pass, justice must be satisfied, and hearts must be changed. God has undertaken to do this. He has prepared the way, in order that He may fulfil His promise of the Holy Ghost. The Son of God has satisfied justice by His precious blood, and by its power hearts can be changed. He has made the course down which the living waters can flow to a barren world. His life (v. 22), crucifixion (23) and resurrection (24-32) have made it possible for God to look with favour upon sinners. The blood shed has prepared the way for the Spirit to inhabit the hearts of men. Has this been done in your heart? Unless we have personally experienced the power of the precious blood to cleanse, and bring us near to God, we cannot know the Holy Ghost as personally indwelling the heart.

So by the death of Christ all hindrances are put away. But

will God go further than this, and really bestow the priceless gift of the Holy Ghost? Do we need a proof that He is willing? The ascension of Christ is given to us. This is proof enough! He, whom they knew as Jesus of Nazareth, has been exalted with great power (v. 33), to God's right hand, where He has all power and authority in heaven and earth (Matt. 28: 18). He who promised to send the Spirit to His disciples, and bade them expect Him, has received that gift to bestow on whomsoever He will (Acts 2: 33). The outpouring on the day of Pentecost proves that He is exalted there. And if He is on the throne of God, the promise, is to you and your children, and to all that are afar off (v. 39).

Little wonder that the people in Jerusalem were convicted. They saw how they had opposed God's purposes of wonderful grace. They understood that God had had it in His heart to bless them, and had done His best to carry out His intentions, but that they had directly opposed Him. They saw the blessing that might have been theirs, had not their unbelief and sin hindered it. They saw how they had wronged the deep, self-sacrificing love of God. Was there any hope for them? Would God forgive such hardness of heart? Could they regain the blessing they had opposed and forfeited? No wonder that, seeing in some measure their sin and their position before God, they cried out, "What shall we do?" (v. 37).

Well might we also cry out, having sinned as they had. Have not God's purposes of grace been the same to us as to them? Has He not done the work at Calvary to enable Him to carry out His purposes to us also? The precious blood shed has made it possible for Him to dwell in us. But we have hindered Him. The sin we have loved or allowed, unbelief, the world, or the flesh have prevented the accomplishment of the desires of His heart. He would let no consideration on His side hinder those purposes. He emptied heaven of its Treasure. He sacrificed His Son. But we ourselves have prevented God from blessing us as He wanted.

"What shall we do?" May we still inherit the blessing?

Is there any hope? Yes. God's long-suffering is not yet exhausted! Even we may receive "remission of these sins," and also "the gift of" the same filling by "the Holy Ghost" (v. 38) that Peter and others had just received. Then and there Peter assured them that at once the promise could be fulfilled to them. Assuredly, then, may every reader know that God offers it now to him. For the promise is to us who "are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (v. 39; 1 Thess. 5: 23, 24).

May our faith grasp this glorious reality! No matter what our past has been, we can now, if we will, obtain the Pentecostal blessing. The promise of the Father is still, by infinite grace, open to us!

These are the simple terms: "Repent, and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2: 38).

Repentance implies a change of mind towards all sin, doubt, and fear, that we have allowed in the past. It means ending the old life, and beginning a new life by the power of God.

Baptism, as we read in Romans 6, involves appropriating the issues of our identification with Jesus Christ. He died to put away sin, and this He will work out in us; so that within we will find a mind that reckons ourselves dead indeed unto sin, and a will that henceforth by His resurrection power yields our members only to righteousness so that we walk in newness of life.

The gift is offered to me! Well may I separate myself from all who are walking in worldliness and carnality (v. 40), and will not receive the fulness God means for them. Read carefully verse 38 before God. Do I really die unto sin? Is my repentance thorough? I believe my past is cleansed by the precious blood. I gladly receive His sure word that "I shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." In spite of past failure, fault, and fear, I take the gift in faith. The Holy Ghost is mine, and I am His. Now I thank Him in faith and bear witness to my confidence. Then I seek from Him some clear witness from the Bible as to that which He has done in me.

Christian Life in Spiritual Power

THE results of the baptism of the Holy Ghost will be very manifest in the private and public life of those who have received. There will be no doubt in the minds of Christians who live with them that sin is dethroned in them, and Christ has taken its place. Thus, in these early disciples, the fruits of the Holy Ghost were manifested at once. Their ordinary life was one of joyful holiness and power.

The Spirit works now, much as He did then. So the life of a Spirit-filled man or woman now bears a close resemblance to that which we read of them in Acts 2: 44-47.

Unity

“All that believed were together.” The Spirit brings wonderful union and fellowship with others. Minor differences are forgotten. There is lowliness, and mutual forbearance and peace. Hearts, occupied by the same Spirit, cannot help being closely bound together. Those who are purified from sin, and full of love by the Spirit, experience no petty rubs and annoyance from others.

Self-sacrifice and Generosity

And, moreover, “they had all things common.” The Holy Ghost saves men altogether from selfishness and covetousness. They rejoice to be able to help others with their property; and gladly allow others to use it just as if it were their own. Yes, they would “sell their possessions and goods” if they could thereby supply the wants of others. And, if they possess things that others need more than they do, they gladly deny themselves, and give them to them.

Love

Such is the deep, warm, practical love towards others with which the Holy Ghost still can fill the heart. This love does not seek her own, is not provoked, and thinks no evil. It makes every man seek not his own good, but that of others. It makes him glad to spend and be spent, so as to benefit them. Where shall we find such love? Wherever there is anyone full of the Holy Ghost. It is by the Spirit that men and women love others as themselves, and love God with all their heart.

United Worship

They love to draw near to Him. They hunger to know more of His truth. Prayer and praise are their great delights, and so every day these Christians met in the public services of the Temple, and the more private meetings at each other's houses; for meetings are no longer a drudgery, but a delight to those full of the Spirit. They glory in any opportunities of grace and blessing.

Joy and Gladness

But there is no gloom or darkness about them. All is brightness and "gladness" (v. 46). The Spirit fills them with joy that is full and that continues (Rom. 15: 13, John 15: 11). They can rejoice evermore, even in tribulation (2 Cor. 7: 4). And at times their joy is unspeakable and full of glory.

Singleness of Heart

They will continue full of light, because the Spirit keeps their heart single (v. 46). They can whole-heartedly live for God. Their life is no longer a divided one. Their all is upon the altar for God, and by the Spirit they have no inclination to take it back. Their minds are set upon one thing—fully to know Christ. Their lives have only one object—the glory of God by the salvation of sinners.

A Joy to God and Man

These are the lives that praise God (v. 47). From them there continually rises to heaven an incense of praise that is a sweet savour to God. On earth others glorify God because of them. "They have favour with all the people." Even sinners admire such lives. They can appreciate their love, and joy, and peace, and power. It makes them long for the same blessing, which is so different from their experience. So, when these Christians speak to them, and in the name of Christ offer them the same salvation, they gladly accept. They are born again of the Spirit. And thus the Lord adds to the Church continually such as should be saved.

The same Spirit abides and works in us. Let us allow Him to live His life through us without diminution or hindrance. Let Him work in us, not according to our feeble faith and interpretation of His promises, but according to the riches of His grace, and the exceeding greatness of His power. Then He will be satisfied in us; and we shall be satisfied in God, and have power to extend His kingdom; and our hearts will have now a foretaste of the millenium when Christ reigns and

THE TABERNACLE OF GOD IS WITH MEN,
AND HE WILL DWELL WITH THEM,
AND THEY SHALL BE HIS PEOPLE,
AND GOD HIMSELF SHALL BE WITH THEM
AND BE THEIR GOD.