

THE GREATEST NEED OF EVERY CHRISTIAN

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I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire (Matt. 3:11).

One of the most interesting and challenging things about the inspired servants of God is that during their lifetime something happened to change them. For example, D. L. Moody, the great evangelist, described a time when his ministry was revolutionized. Prior to that experience he was a very ordinary pastor, and unfortunately nothing of great importance ever occurred. Then came the blessed anointing. He said, "I preached the same sermons, but God's blessing rested upon them in a way I had never known." John Wesley, Finney, and a host of great Christians shared a similar experience. Something outstanding changed their lives; they were never the same again. New zeal burned within them, and multitudes of souls were brought into the kingdom of God. Unfortunately, instead of desiring a similar experience, theologians began debating about its validity, and this brought conflicts to the churches. Some people said it was a second blessing," but others stated it was a natural development from conversion. They argued that since every Christian is a temple of the Holy Spirit, there was no need for Him to enter the believer the second time, but He could arise from within to anoint believers with fresh power. All kinds of definitions began to appear within the vocabulary of the church. Preachers expounded on the benefit of total surrender, sanctification, the fullness of blessing, and the anointing, etc. Yet it was conspicuous that while these ministers argued about interpretation, they continued to preach to empty pews. They were more eloquent than efficient. They did not explain how Moody had been changed from a mediocre pastor to one of the greatest soul winners.

John the Baptist said he baptized with water, but the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Most people are acquainted with immersion in water but remain ignorant of the new baptism to be given by Christ. Fire is associated with action.

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Any sportsman who exhibits enthusiasm is said to be fiery, that is, energized by a new wave of emotion. A man of fire is like an athlete who runs like a deer, he shouts like a politician, convinces like a salesman, and waves his arms like a windmill! It should be recognized that this baptism of fire is not excessive shouting from a pulpit, for empty barrels sometimes make the most sound. Some eloquent auctioneers sell junk! History suggests that when Christians are completely dedicated, the Lord, in an unmistakable fashion, anoints them with ability to do what earlier was impossible. The soul will be warmed with the presence of Christ, which makes everything else insignificant.

People ask, "Have you been baptized with the Holy Spirit?" The answer should be sought not in words, but in the service being rendered for the Savior. There are people who claim to have received all kinds of spiritual gifts, but their deeds do not endorse the statements made. They are self-centered, obnoxious, and repulsive. They speak about the fire of the Divine Spirit, but their hearts remain cold. There is no way of knowing what sermon topics occupied the attention of the pastors of the Laodicean church, but they might have

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spoken about the power of the Holy Spirit when their own souls remained lukewarm (see Rev. 3:14-22).

It should be remembered that John the Baptist did not speak to theological students. He addressed a multitude of people

who "went out to him [from] Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan" (Matt. 3:5). Whatever the "Baptism with Fire" was to be, it was meant for everybody and not reserved exclusively for men who were destined to become apostles. Every Christian minister needs it, as do others from all walks of life. We all need it, for this was the gift which enabled the early believers who, when they were persecuted, "went every where preaching the word" (see Acts 8:4).

God's Fire Purifies... Completely

But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap. And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as

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gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness (Mal. 3:2-3).

Matthew described how, after the Lord cleansed the temple, the lame and the blind came to Him in the sanctuary, and He healed them (see Man. 21:14). This was to be expected. First, the Savior expelled the people who defiled the house of God, and then He filled it with His glory. Malachi predicted this would happen. The Lord could not fill a filthy house with the glory of God, and that fact remains unchanged. When the prophet delivered his message, the refining of gold and silver was a simple process. I have seen the machines used in the gold fields of South Africa, in which the ore is crushed and the precious metal extracted. Malachi was unacquainted with such complicated methods. He only knew of the craftsman who sat with a crucible and carefully controlled the refining fire. It is claimed he knew when the process was complete when the reflection of his face could be seen in the molten metal. The fire of God purifies the most precious things in existence the immortal souls of the people for whom Christ died. This process is necessary, for without it, entrance into the city of God will be denied. "Nothing that defileth shall enter therein" (Rev. 21:27).

God's Fire Prevails... Consistently

[Elisha] took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over (2 Kings 2:13).

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them (Acts 2:2-3).

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls (Acts 2:41).

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It is significant that before Elisha wore his master's mantle, he destroyed his own garments. They were no longer needed. He had requested a double portion of the prophet's spirit be given to him, and that request was granted. He performed twice as many miracles as did his master. The ancient story provides a prototype of what happened to the disciples after their Master ascended into heaven. What had been a small flame became a raging fire of devotion and enthusiasm which evangelized the world. It is unbelievable that men who had been disappointing and unreliable succeeded in leading thousands of souls to Christ. Evidently something happened both to Elisha and to the disciples of Jesus. They were transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Feeble, ineffective men became invincible. That experience should be sought by every Christian. It would replace defeat with victory which the gates of hell could not withstand. Elisha refused to leave his master. He remained with him until the end. Does this have any connection with the fact that, although five hundred people began the prayer meeting which preceded the day of Pentecost, only one hundred twenty endured to the end? So many Christians resemble the believers in Galatia of whom Paul wrote: "Ye did run well; who did hinder you?" (Gal. 5:7).

The disciples who were present when the Holy Spirit came had plenty of time in which to reflect, repent, and renew their vows. They understood, as did Elisha, there was no need to depend upon human resources. They relied entirely upon the

Holy Spirit. The Heavenly Refiner was gazing intently at His precious metal and was pleased to see His reflection. Dross had been removed and the disciples made ready to be instruments of the living Christ. If this self-examination had not preceded Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit might have been delayed or abandoned. God used people who were completely dependent upon Him. He used clean vessels and not those filled with cobwebs!

Perhaps there is a shortage of such people today because many Christians dislike the heat of God's refining fires. When the revival came to Wales in the year 1904, God's power fell upon a young man named Evan Roberts who was troubled by the complacency of his nation. After attending a service in the

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church, he knelt in the middle of a field and prayed all night. He was still on his knees at dawn. When he began his vigil, he was an inexperienced Christian. He arose a man of God prepared to lead the greatest crusade ever experienced in his native land. This was his baptism of fire. Apparently, he did not speak in tongues as did the apostles, but he worked overtime using what he already possessed. We all need a similar experience. Beginning with the ministers and continuing to the youngest members of the church-everybody needs to be anointed with the Holy Spirit and with fire!

God's Fire Protects... Continually

Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? (Prov. 6:27-28).

Solomon was a very observant man. Many of the simple things he saw were expressed in proverbs now known throughout the world. Unfortunately, in spite of the wisdom with which he had been endowed, the king rejected the advice given to others and became a victim of his lust. The unholy fire which he permitted

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to burn within his soul became an inferno which destroyed him.

We never saw brush fires in Wales, for intermittent rain kept everything damp. Once there was a small outbreak on the mountain, and it created national interest. When I came to California, I learned how people fight fire with fire. Back fires are used to destroy the vegetation ahead of the approaching danger. Things would have been different during the reign of Solomon had the king been acquainted with this procedure. Paul reminded the Philippians of the desirable fruit of the Spirit and then urged them to "think on these things" (see Phil. 4:8). When the holy fire of God burns within the Christian's mind, its power destroys everything which is a menace to spirituality.

Breathe on me, Breath of God
'Till I am wholly Thine,
Until this earthly part of me
Glows with Thy fire divine.

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