

# A BAPTISM OF FIRE

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with minor editorial changes 2018

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We would like to call the reader's attention to a very important, but much overlooked, aspect of the prophetic pronouncement made by John the Baptist, regarding the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Please note his words in Matt. 3:11,12:

*"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. Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

We have dealt with the matter of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but we notice that John declared that there is a baptism with FIRE. What could be the meaning of a baptism with fire?

We note further that John said,

*"A fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor," that He will "burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" and "gather the wheat into His garner". (Luke 3:17)*

This terminology seems to refer to the second coming of our Lord at which time there will be a separation of the sheep from the goats and the wheat from the tares. But upon close examination, it appears that the reference is to something that is concurrent with the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Please notice that reference is not made to "tares" but rather to "chaff".

Now "chaff" is that which encloses the kernel in the stages of growth and development until the kernel is mature enough to be "threshed" out of the chaff. The wheat is gathered into the garner and the chaff is consumed by the "fire", but notice that there is a baptism of fire which seems to be part and parcel with the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Although it is a non-controversial fact that fire will be the means that God will use to destroy the wicked, (See Rev. 20:9,15), the symbol of "fire" is also used in describing the process of cleansing and purifying that is to take place in the life of a born-again, Spirit-filled believer. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is not a goal that is reached after which we can relax and take it easy. It is not the apex of Christian service but the genesis. It is the beginning of a life of fuller service to the Lord Jesus.

Jesus said that when the Spirit came it would "guide into all truth". One writer described it thus, "It is the nature of the Holy Spirit to form in the believer those graces that manifest the nature of Christ and to forbid the presence of those traits of character that are offensive to the nature of Christ". It is "an added dimension in spiritual living". Someone has said, "God gives us the Holy Ghost as an anesthetic to get us ready for spiritual surgery."

So we see one ministry of the Holy Spirit is to burn out the "chaff" in our lives so that we are the "kernel of wheat". It is the wheat that God wants to use. We must go through the "threshing-floor" experience so that the chaff can be beaten out and the wheat kernel is released. This experience can be very unpleasant at times but it is imperative if we are going to be productive.

This process of elimination, of a "breaking", and a fashioning, is spoken of as clay in the hands of the potter. Jeremiah described it thus,

*"Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the Word of the Lord came to me saying, 'O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter?' saith the Lord. 'Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in Mine hand'." (Jer. 18:3-6)*

We note that the vessel that was "marred" was not cast away. The potter took the marred vessel and broke it, using the same clay to fashion another vessel.

So God desires to do with us. Our self-will, self-pity, self-seeking, self-indulgence, and pride must be dealt with, broken and "burnt" in the "fire" of the Holy Spirit. Our sensitiveness, touchiness, self-defense, self-consciousness, fear, worry, resentment, and all the "carnal" traits of character, have to be "burnt out" by the fire of the Holy Spirit.

This is not an instantaneous work, it is an ongoing process. It is a daily "dying to self". Paul put it this way,

*"Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of the Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." (2 Cor. 4:10, 11)*

The words of Jesus are pertinent here. He said,

*"He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for My sake, shall find it." (Matt. 10:39)*

In another instance He said,

*"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come." (John 16:12, 13)*

Jesus said further that the Spirit would,

*"reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:" (John 16:8)*

It is unfortunate that this work of the Spirit is not recognized in many charismatic circles. Therefore the "atomic" power of the Spirit of God in the life of many believers has produced an awful lot of "fallout". These undesirable effects are the result of a refusal to be broken before God so that the Spirit can consume the carnality in the lives of Christians.

God knows how much we need a cleansing and purifying of our vessels so that we may be productive. That's why there is a baptism of fire along with a baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus used another analogy, that of pruning of the branches. He said,

*"Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." (John 15:2)*

Notice that Jesus "pergeth" the branch that beareth fruit that it may bring forth more fruit. So we see that the process of purging is not for the unbeliever, it is for the believer, a believer that is bearing some fruit, but because of hindrances in their life, there is a need of purging a burning out of carnality. So the baptism in the Spirit is not just to "edify yourself", or for "ministering" to the body. Its accompanying baptism is a baptism of fire.

This "fire" is meant to burn the "hay, wood and stubble" of our own building, so that the "Gold, silver and precious stones" of God's building may be separated like the wheat from the chaff, and we become a spiritual temple not made with hands, but by the Spirit of the living God. We would like to use Paul's words with reference to this matter:

*"Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire, and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." (1 Cor. 3:12, 13)*

Now there are some people who say this passage applies to the second coming of Christ, that the "fire" is the judgment, that the believer who has been building with "hay, wood and stubble" will be saved, but that he will not have any "reward". It is my view that this is a dangerous position to take. The reason is obvious. We can continue to live carnal lives, in fact, we give license to sin, and yet we claim we will be saved "by the skin of our teeth". I do not believe that Paul is speaking of the judgment at the second coming of Christ. I believe Paul is speaking of the process of cleansing and purifying that we must go through in this present life. The "fire" is the consuming work of the Holy Spirit in the yielded, submitted, consecrated Christian. The "day" is the dawning of new revelation which is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Let us notice some other passages of Scriptures that speak of the same thing. Peter declares,

*"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God..." (1 Peter 4:17)*

Paul puts it this way,

*"For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." (1 Cor. 11 :31,32)*

Making it more specific, Paul says,

*"For whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." (Heb. 12:6)*

Because we are the "sons of God", God dealeth with us as sons. This will demand discipline and correction. When God reveals our carnal nature to us, it is because He loves us and desires maturity in our lives. Again Paul declares,

*"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith..." (2 Cor. 13:5) Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the God." (2 Cor. 7:1)*

Notice that Paul is directing this admonition to the "dearly beloved" who had received the promises. Surely this would include every child of God. God desires spiritual growth and maturity. Oh may we yield our stubborn wills to Him and let Him mold and fashion us after His divine pattern!

I believe this is a much neglected teaching in the church today, and yet it is so essential. Because we have neglected to teach and implement this very important truth, the average Christian's experience today is very shallow and mediocre. There is very little real deep seeking for a walk of obedience and conformity to God's will and purpose in the lives of God's people. God is presented as a great big sugar daddy with His pockets full of candy bars, and He will come running to you like a chief butler to satisfy your every desire. All you have to do is "believe" in the Lord Jesus Christ. Then you can ask Him for anything. He will give it to you. The kingdom of God is a huge welfare state, you don't have to "work" for anything, you get it from God's great storehouse simply by asking. Salvation is by faith, you know! And that is the sum total of the "gospel". Don't put people into "bondage" by telling them that they must keep any law. This is the modern concept of the Christian life. Doctrine is not important, in fact, with many "Christians" it is a "dirty" word. And perhaps the most ardent promoters of this concept are the neo-charismatics. But the classic charismatics are not far behind, neither are the "evangelicals", especially the "free evangelicals". And the "fundamentalists" are in the same crowd who do not want to "rock the boat" or to disturb their pious pretensions of holiness.

But God is moving by His Spirit, nonetheless. And He is shaking the churches. Everything that is moveable is being "shook out". The chaff is being separated from the wheat. "Marred vessels" are being broken. Carnal men "of the cloth" are being exposed. The hypocrisy in the religious profession cannot withstand the heat of the "purging" God is doing today. So multitudes are being "threshed out" from the true body of Christ. The Bride is being adorned with the white garments of righteousness in preparation for the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Those who refuse and resist the cleansing and purifying work of the Spirit of God will become more deeply entrenched in their carnality, their paganism, and their rebellion against God. There is today a massive spirit of deception that is sweeping the world. We do not refer to the spirit of anti-christ in its overt manifestation in such ideologies as communism, atheism, agnosticism, occultism, pantheism, satanism, eastern religious cultism or even humanism. Sincere Christians can usually identify these obvious counterfeits. But we refer to the "easy-believism", the ecclesiastical superficiality and the carnal permissiveness that is becoming the accepted status quo of a "born-again" Christian. Someone has said we are living in a "post-Christian" era. In other words, real, genuine, holy, transformed, spirit-endued, spirit-endowed Christianity is now a footnote in church history.

We have embarked on a new age, an era when every person is a law unto themselves. Situation ethics is a criterion, not just for the ultraliberal and the humanist; everybody interprets the Bible the way they see it, which is usually the way they want. There are no absolutes. So we have homosexuals and lesbians occupying "Christian" pulpits. "Unity" is the watchword of the hour. So Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism and Islam are having dialogue for the purpose of world unity. "Differences" are being put aside so we can pray together with the Mohammedans, the Jews, and even invite some of the eastern cults to participate! Today, the slogan is, "Let's get together". Let's lay aside our doctrinal differences. We must remove the disparity between the "have-nations" and the "have-not-nations". The message of the hour is economic sharing. This, they say, will bring peace to the world.

Spiritual truths and values are not the essential ingredients in modern Christian circles. Don't evangelize because you might have to tell the Mohammedan that their prophet is a false prophet. Don't disturb the pious Catholic when they count their rosary or perform their pagan rites in the name of the Christian God. To dissent will soon be illegal. To expose error will be considered "hate-literature". It must be banned. To protest corruption is dangerous - you might be "liquidated". It is now popular to accept bribes. You see, everybody is doing it. To flaunt the law of the land is not considered wrong unless you get caught, and even then, don't worry, our judicial system has so deteriorated that if you kill one, or one hundred people, the penalty will be the same, and the parole system will consider you "rehabilitated" after a few months in a prison that has almost all the amenities that the "free" man has. The "free" man must constantly strive for higher wages to pay higher taxes to pamper criminals who go on "strike" for better living conditions. Someone has said, "Something is wrong with a society that frees the criminal before the victim is out of the hospital".

Yes, our society has gone on the rocks of despair as far as finding the answers to the multitude of ills that beset it.

We have mentioned the above sad state of affairs in the world because we believe they are relevant to the subject at hand. Someone has said, "As goes the Church, so goes the nation". In fact, I believe the only restraining force in the world today that prevents a total collapse and annihilation of the human race, is the presence of God-fearing, God-loving, and God-obeying Christians, who are still proclaiming the old-fashioned, soul-saving message of repentance of sin, and a turning away from the works of the flesh, the world and the devil. Unless the gospel message contains that element which causes people to cry out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do that we might be saved?", it is powerless to transform lives. And unless lives are transformed by the regenerating power of the merits of Calvary, mankind will continue to live under the bondage of sin. Paul declared that we must put off the works of the flesh, and put on the nature of Christ.

So this brings us back to the "baptism of fire". It is this baptism that is so desperately needed today. The only way we can address the needs of the human race is to confront the degenerate nature of sinful mankind. It's mankind's nature that needs changing. And you can't bring about the change with a "fig leaf" religion. Sin demands death.

But someone says, "Jesus died in my stead". We say, "Hallelujah, Praise God!" But Christ's death on the cross is only for confessed sins. John said,

*"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)*

And the problem of sin includes more than overt acts of disobedience. There is a sin of omission, as well as commission. The Bible says,

*"... to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." (James 4:17)*

And Paul did not leave us guessing as to what we should "put off" and "mortify". We prefer to use his own words as found in Colossians, the third chapter:

*"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. ... Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence (unholy desires), and covetousness, which is idolatry: ... put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that you have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him: ... Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, ..."*

This list is quite all-inclusive. There isn't much that hinders spiritual growth and maturity that Paul leaves out. And bear in mind that the great apostle does not leave the issue optional. He states flatly, "Put off" the works of the flesh. And then he declares, "Put on" the NEW MAN! (V. 10)

This is what genuine Christianity is all about. The gospel is not only salvation from sin, it includes the power of the Spirit of God to change mankind's nature so that it is subservient to the imparted nature of Christ. This is done through the baptism of fire.

From the recorded evidence of the lives of the early Christians after their Pentecostal experience, we can conclude that they were indeed baptized with the fire of the Holy Spirit. No longer do we see them quarreling as to who is going to be the greatest in the kingdom. There was one consuming motivation: that of preaching and living the gospel that transforms people's lives. One short commentary given in Acts 4:32 will produce the evidence,

*"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own. but they had all things common,"*

Going back to the Day of Pentecost, we find the Bible says "tongues of fire" sat upon each of them (Acts 2:3). And they were "filled with the Holy Ghost" after which they spake the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31). We believe the bestowal of power was the result of "waiting before God". That is, they presented their bodies a "living sacrifice", allowing the Holy Spirit to "burn out" their selfishness, pride, self-will, self-pity, self-seeking, self-indulgence, self-defense, self-consciousness, fear, worry, resentment, sensitiveness, touchiness, and all the "carnal" traits of character that hinder and block the work of the Holy Spirit. Then when the Day of Pentecost was fully come, they were ready for the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Their vessels were made "empty", so that they could be "filled".

This author believes that many many people today have hands laid on them for the reception of the Holy Spirit when they have not yet genuinely repented of their sins, who have not had "godly sorrow" for their sins, in fact, have no desire to forsake many "pet sins" which they still love and cherish and harbour in their lives. They do not want a baptism of fire. like Simon, in Samaria, whose heart was still full of wickedness, yet he wanted the same power that Peter and John had, (See Acts 8:18-24), so, many people today want the blessing of God without really yielding their lives to Christ and allowing the baptism of fire to purify and cleanse them.

This is not only offensive to a Holy God, It is extremely unfortunate for the person, for it will be a constant hindrance to them in living the abundant life which is available in Christ. You see, the reason God wants to "burn up" the chaff in our lives is because He knows it is the only way to victorious Christian living. Paul summarizes the life of the carnal Christian with these words,

*"Oh wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24)*

...Then he answers his own question with these words,

*"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Rom. 8:1)*

The Bible tells of many instances where "fire" is used with reference to cleansing, purifying and sanctifying. One such case is that of Isaiah. When Isaiah beheld the awesome glory and holiness of God he confessed,

*"... Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I, send me." (Isaiah 6:5-8)*

It is this kind of confession that will light the fire of God that consumes uncleanness. When the "coal of fire" touched Isaiah's lips he was cleansed and then was prepared to go for God. Oh for more of that fire today on the lips of God's servants!

It was not until Moses met God in the "burning bush" that he realized his unworthiness, and his dependence upon God and that God was able to use him to deliver Israel. (See Ex. 3:1-3)

James and John wanted "seats" in the kingdom, but Jesus promised them suffering first. The seats come after suffering. Many preachers are looking for a pulpit with a salary, but they do not want the "pilgrimage" that goes with a separated life. Everybody shows up for the picnic but only a few women "prayer warriors" show up at prayer meetings. Our generation seeks cushions and shys the cross. Why the superficiality? The baptism of fire is missing. The cry of our hearts should be, "Oh God, make your people aware of the desperate need for a baptism of fire."

Now the baptism of fire involves a very important principle which Jesus spoke of in John 12:24,25,

*"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."*

We have noted the process of separation of the wheat from the chaff. But now we see Jesus talking about a "corn of wheat" falling into the ground and dying. At first observation, it appears ironical that a kernel of wheat having gone through a "threshing", a separation from the chaff, should now fall into the ground and die. But notice that Jesus said that unless the kernel of wheat dies, it abideth alone.

Christ is here talking about fruit bearing. And we have noticed already that fruit bearing is very essential. In fact, Jesus said that the branch that does not bear fruit is cut off. And the branch that does bear fruit is "purged" or pruned, that it may bring forth more fruit.

The believers presence here on earth is not just to enjoy the blessings that God bestows from day to day. This world is not our permanent dwelling place, not in its present state. We are here as witnesses. We have been delegated with a royal commission to witness to the world that Jesus, the Messiah, is the Saviour of mankind, and that God has a plan and a purpose for this world which He desires to work out and come into fulfilment through our ministry.

But in order to be really effective in our witnessing, Jesus, using the metaphor of the "kernel of wheat", declares there needs to be a "death" to self, and a resurrection to the life of Jesus. This is the principle of death and resurrection. This principle is exemplified in the ordinance of water baptism. But Jesus is speaking of something we must implement in our lives after our new-birth and water baptism. Water baptism is the burial of our past life of sin. We must thereafter begin walking a new life in Christ· a walk of holiness and separation. This new walk of holiness, however, is not intended to be a life of isolation from the world. Jesus did not call us to be hermits. We are called to be ambassadors. We must have a message of hope and salvation. But this message cannot be carried successfully to the world by our own strength or wisdom. Paul declared,

*"... My preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." (1 Cor. 2:4, 5)*

This type of ministry demands a total surrender, commitment, and dedication. A surrender of our will to the will of God. By this we do not mean that we are to be robots. God gave mankind a will and He desires us to use our will. But our will must, be brought into harmony with God's will. The Scriptures tell us that we are co-workers with Christ. God appeals to our intellect. He desires that we choose to follow His will because His will is for our benefit and blessing.

So we are to choose, as Paul on the Damascus road, to do as our "Lord" directs us to do. The principle of death and resurrection then is an overt act of bringing our will into harmony with the will of God. Jesus said the kernel of wheat must "fall into the ground", (humbling ourselves), and die, (surrender of our will), that it might bring forth fruit. This speaks of "resurrected life". It is not enough to die to self. Thomas did not ask to feel the wounds in Jesus' side to know that He had died. He knew that! He wanted to know that the Jesus who died and was placed in the tomb, was now alive.

So likewise, a crucifixion of our carnal nature must be followed by a "resurrection" - an anointing of those talents and gifts which God bestows to each and every member in His "Body". We now speak of an anointed ministry; a ministry blessed by the Spirit of the living God. An intellectual understanding and acceptance of the principles pertaining to God's plan of salvation is not sufficient. The truths in God's Word must be incorporated into our very being and implemented in our daily walk. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will take that which God imparts to us and "quicken" it, that is, make it alive. The disciples spoke in tongues "as the Spirit gave them utterance". It is the life of Christ that motivates the yielded vessel producing the fruit of the Spirit's anointing. May we open our hearts to a baptism of the Spirit and of Fire!



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BURN IN ME

BURN in me fire of God  
Burn till my heart is pure,  
Burn till I love God fervently  
Burn till my faith is sure.

Burn in me fire of God,  
Burn deeper, deeper still;  
Burn till my one and sole desire  
Shall be the Father's will.

Burn in me fire of God  
Until within shall rise  
And out, and up to God's great throne  
A pleasing sacrifice.

(Note: This booklet is chapter six of the larger publication entitled, "The Holy Spirit, complete edition".)