

THE COMING OF THE COMFORTER

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Ever since God placed mankind on this cosmos, it has been His joy and pleasure to have intimate fellowship and communion with us. Even after mankind disobeyed God, we find God demonstrating His love and concern for us as we read in Genesis 3:8,9,

"And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence from the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, 'Where art thou?'"

When the whole world became so wicked that the Lord God had to call a flood upon the earth to terminate the rule of violence and sin, He found only one family that obeyed His laws, and He spoke to Noah.

In Genesis 6:8,13,18, we read,

"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. And God said unto Noah, 'The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy son's wives with thee.'"

Once again, we find God's concern and interest in His covenant people when He calls Abraham out of idolatry and gives him the promise,

"And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing." (Gen.12:2)

GOD SEEKS COMMUNION WITH MAN

Again, we find God seeking communion with His created beings as He instructs Moses,

"Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them." (Exodus 25:8)

We see God manifesting His presence among His people as He leads them out of Egyptian bondage, through the wilderness, and into the promised land,

"And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night by a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and by night. He took not away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people." (Exodus 13:21,22)

When Jesus Christ came into the world, He was called "Immanuel", which means, "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). This is without doubt the greatest demonstration of God's love for mankind, and His desire to have fellowship with us.

But in due course of time Jesus ascended to the Father. By what means does God dwell among His people today? Is there a divine visitation of God among and within the believer today? By what evidence do we see God's divine presence today?

Well, we are not left in the dark relative to this all important matter. In fact, there are many prophecies relative to the method God uses today to commune with His people, as well as to lead, to direct, and to empower, the Church of Jesus Christ.

I wish to provide Scriptural information regarding the divine plan of communion between God and mankind, and the method God employs today to lead His people. Let us see what the Scriptures say about this matter.

"BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY GHOST"

In Matthew 3: 11 we read the words of John the Baptist which are prophetic, and which are definitely pertinent to the matter at hand,

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, ... He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire."

To these prophetic words we add Christ's own testimony recorded in Acts 1:5,

"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY GHOST not many days hence."

If we had no other Scriptural evidence, this would be sufficient to establish the point of evidence. But there are many more marvelous Scriptures regarding the "COMING OF THE COMFORTER". Let us see. In John 14:16,17, we read,

"And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever. Even the Spirit of Truth; Whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him; ... FOR HE DWELLETH WITH YOU, AND SHALL BE IN YOU."

We must pause at this Scripture for a moment and notice the import and implication. Jesus told His disciples that He was going to leave them and return to the Father. They became sad and felt they would be left alone in a cruel, unbelieving world. But Jesus made them a promise that He would pray to the Father to give them another Comforter. And He tells them Who this is to be EVEN THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH, Whom the Father would send in His Name, and that this Holy Ghost would teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever He had told them. Though He Himself must go away, yet Jesus said in John 14:27,

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Jesus tells His disciples that,

"But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the SPIRIT OF TRUTH, which proceedeth from the Father, HE SHALL TESTIFY OF ME." (John 15:26)

Therefore Jesus further declares, (John 16:7-8,13),

"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: •••• 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."

Now there are some marvelous truths in the above quoted Scriptures. One we wish to call to the reader's attention is the fact that the Holy Spirit WAS NOT YET GIVEN while Jesus was here on earth. To the above Scriptures let us add another wonderful reference from John 7:37-39,

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: FOR THE HOLY GHOST WAS NOT YET GIVEN; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.'"

HOLY GHOST NOT YET GIVEN

What is the full meaning of Jesus' remarkable statement? What did He mean when He said that the Holy Ghost WAS NOT YET GIVEN? Had not many men of God prior to this time received the Holy Spirit? Anyone who has an elementary knowledge of the Bible knows that the Spirit of God came upon men in Old Testament days.

Marvelous and wondrous deeds were done through the power of the Holy Spirit. Then what did Jesus mean? Surely there must be a peculiar and remarkable fact concerning the COMING OF THE COMFORTER of which Jesus, our Lord, speaks in the above Scriptures.

Coupled with Jesus' own testimony is that of John the Baptist,

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, ... He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." (Matt. 3: 11)

And the prophet Joel declared,

"And it shall come to pass afterwards, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My Spirit." (Joel 2:28,29)

There is something outstanding and worthy of note in this prophecy. The time would come, said Joel, that God would pour out His Spirit upon ALL FLESH. Not just a chosen few, not just the priest, the prophet, and the king, but upon ALL FLESH. Your sons and your daughters, the servant and the handmaids, the old men and the young men. Oh, what a wonderful promise! But the most wonderful part is that the time has arrived for the promise to be fulfilled in the life of every believer! Just before He was taken away, Jesus said,

"And, behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:49)

In perfect obedience to the Saviour's words, we find the believers all with one accord continuing in prayer and supplication in the upper room. (See Acts 1:14).

" And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, ... 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. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."(Acts 2:1-4)

It is of utmost importance that we understand and recognize the implication of this fulfilled prophetic utterance in the life of the believer today. I am sure no one who has any respect and regard for the authenticity of God's Word will deny the fulfilment of the Scripture quoted above in this experience in Acts chapter two. And Peter leaves no room whatsoever for disputation, for he stands up and declares,

"... Be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken as ye suppose ... But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;." (Verses 14-16)

THE PROMISE FULFILLED

How can anyone discredit Peter's testimony? He said Joel's prophecy was fulfilled right there and then. In verse 33 Peter says,

"Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost , He hath shed forth this which ye NOW SEE AND HEAR."

Being the fulfilment of divine prophecy, all heaven beheld as the thunders of Sinai fade and the ecstatic music of Spirit-filled men and women pour forth the praises of a loving Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind.

The promise of the Comforter has now been fulfilled. Listen to that company of humble worshippers as they extol the riches of the glory of God's saving grace. What rapture! What joy! What celestial tongues of heavenly praise gush forth as "rivers of living water". There is no fear, there is no pride. All are lifted above earthly and carnal adulteration. There is perfect harmony and perfect order. Here is true worship in Spirit and in Truth!

But did this end at Pentecost? Some would teach that this experience was only for the disciples. Is this true? Is there any record of any subsequent outpourings of the Spirit upon other believers?

Well listen to what Peter declared right then as we read in verses 38 and 39,

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized EVERY ONE OF YOU in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, AND YE SHALL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST. FOR THE PROMISE IS UNTO YOU, AND TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND TO ALL THAT ARE AFAR OFF, EVEN AS MANY AS THE LORD OUR GOD SHALL CALL."

"EVEN AS MANY AS THE LORD OUR GOD SHALL CALL"

But we have more than Peter's prophetic words, as important as they are. We have the record of the actual subsequent outpourings of the Spirit upon later believers.

In fact, God has never ceased to pour out His Spirit upon humble believers since the Comforter has come into the world, for Jesus said He is to abide here. There is no record that God has withdrawn His Spirit from the world, and the same experience that came upon the early disciples of Jesus is for EVERY BELIEVER EVEN TODAY! Praise the wonderful name of the Lord! This promise is for all, EVEN AS MANY AS THE LORD OUR GOD SHALL CALL!

Philip went down to Samaria to preach the gospel. He had great success, and many were saved and healed. When the apostles at Jerusalem heard of this, they sent unto them Peter and John THAT THEY MIGHT RECEIVE THE HOLY GHOST! They laid their hands on the converts, and they received the Holy Spirit. See Acts 8:14-17. Note carefully that these converts were saved, baptized in water, and rejoiced in their new found faith, but yet they had not received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, it was necessary for Peter and John to come and lay hands on them in prayer that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

It is clear from this scenario that the infilling of the Holy Spirit is not the same as conversion. These people had been converted through Philip's preaching BEFORE PETER AND JOHN HAD COME! Indeed, they had already been baptized in water. Peter and John did not question their conversion, neither the validity of their water baptism. They recognized Philip's ministry, and approved it. But it appears that Philip did not have the ministry of laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Spirit.

CONCEPTION BY THE SPIRIT AND BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT

But there is still another important point we must consider here. Granted that these converts had received the Word of God and were converted, how is it then that they had not received the infilling of the Holy Spirit? Can anyone be saved without the Holy Spirit coming into them? The answer is an unequivocal NO! Conversion is a NEW BIRTH! Conversion is the beginning of a new life in God. That new life cannot be separated from the Holy Spirit. The repentant sinner, in accepting Christ into their life, receives at that instant, a MEASURE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT which brings about the conception of NEW LIFE. However, this is not the experience of the baptism or infilling of the Spirit. It can happen, however, that an infilling or baptism in the Holy Spirit will take place at conversion. This is not generally the case, as we have already shown in the above incident, and as we shall show in other passages.

Similarly today, in most cases, the infilling or baptism in the Holy Spirit follows the experience of conversion. And in some cases, years and years afterwards. This is because many people accept Jesus as Saviour, but have never been instructed that He is also their BAPTIZER IN THE HOLY GHOST! The baptism in the Holy Spirit, then, is an added dimension to what one receives at conversion, and its primary purpose is to receive "power to witness". See Acts 1: 8.

Let me emphasize this point. When we say that every believer should receive the "baptism" of the Holy Spirit after the conversion experience, WE DO NOT SAY that one does not receive the Spirit at the time of conversion. It should be obvious to the Scripturally informed person that the Spirit is given by "measure" to various believers according to their faith and yieldedness to God. Jesus is the only one who received the Spirit "without measure", See John 3:34. The appropriation of Biblical promises comes through knowledge, and FAITH, in those promises for each individual personally. One can be used of the Lord mightily, and yet be lacking in some very essential areas of truth as we see in the example of Apollos when he met Aquila and Priscilla. See Acts 18:24-26.

"FOR THEY HEARD THEM SPEAK WITH TONGUES"

Let us now examine another marvelous experience recorded in the 10th chapter of Acts. Here we find Peter called to the home of Cornelius, a devout Gentile believer, and as Peter expounds the mystery of the love of God in the plan of SALVATION TO ALL MEN and nations, the Holy Ghost fell on ALL OF THEM that heard his words. The Jewish Christians who came with Peter were astonished because God poured out His Spirit upon the Gentiles (Verse 45). But how did they know that they had received the Holy Ghost? The answer is in the next verse,

"For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God." (Acts 10:46)

The amazing part of this experience is that the converts were not yet baptized in water, (See verses 47 and 48), and yet they received the baptism in the Holy Spirit! This may be a shock to those who would impose conventional methods. But God is not circumscribed by mankind's rules or laws. God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform. The blessed experience of salvation, and the infilling of the Holy Spirit, is for people of all nations. And the petty prejudices of religious Phariseism cannot restrain the mighty moving of God's providential hand in fulfilling His promises to sincere and honest seekers of the divine Spirit of God.

The other incident I wish to call the reader's attention to is recorded in Acts 19:1-6,

"And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, 'Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?' And they said unto him, 'We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.' And he said unto them, 'Unto what then were ye baptized?' And they said, 'Unto John's baptism.' Then said Paul, 'John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.' When they heard this they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues and prophesied."

It will be noticed that these converts were the result of John the Baptist's ministry. They had been baptized in water by John, and were believers in Christ, the Messiah, for John had declared that Christ, the Messiah, would supersede him. But they had not been baptized in the name of Jesus, neither had they been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Paul's question to them "Have ye received the Holy Ghost SINCE YE BELIEVED" is still a very pertinent question to every believer today.

AN ADDED DIMENSION

The class of Christians that Paul confronted here in Ephesus could well represent many nominal Christians today who have not been confronted with a similar question, "Have you received the Holy Spirit, since you believed?" We notice that Paul did not discredit what the Ephesian believers had before he came there. His desire for them was that they receive the added dimension of blessing in the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

I wish to underscore the same point. When we suggest to believers that there is another dimension in the Holy Spirit beyond that which they may have at present, it is not to discredit what they now have. Surely it should be understood and acknowledged that there are greater dimensions and potentials in the promises and gifts of God for His called-out people than what we have so far attained. The Bible declares that the

"... path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." (Prov. 4:18)

If I might be allowed to use the analogy of any business enterprise, I would suggest that the successful business person will utilize every innovative means to promote the success of their investment. Why should not the Christian do the same in spiritual matters? Of course we are not suggesting the implementation of manmade methods. These will not bring the desired results. But could it be that we have not discovered ALL THE POTENTIAL that is available to the Bible believing Christian? Could it be that our background, or our organizational affiliation, has been a barrier in discovering new truth that is hidden in the Word of God? It has been hidden because we have not been confronted with it.

This has been the experience of this writer. I was raised in a Christian environment. My parents were Bible believing Christians. That is, to the best of their knowledge. But the scope of their understanding was limited to what their denomination taught.

When I discovered that there were some very basic truths that I had not been taught in my denomination, it was a shocking and traumatic experience. It is at such a time that we must be open to God's leading and allow His Word to illuminate our minds and hearts, and we must be willing to move into new areas of revelation of truth. Such an experience will indeed be very rewarding as well as challenging and exciting.

May the Spirit of God move in providential and sovereign grace upon the Church of God Universal that we may appropriate the fullness of His love and blessing and power. Amen.

Yes, the Comforter has come! The promise of Jesus Christ has been fulfilled. Praise God! With the Songwriter, we lift our voices in glad refrain:

"Oh spread the tidings 'round, wherever man is found,
Wherever human hearts and human woes abound,
Let every Christian tongue proclaim the joyful sound,
The Comforter has come!

The Comforter has come, the Comforter has come,
The Holy Ghost from heaven, the Father's promise given,
Oh spread the tidings 'round, wherever man is found,
The Comforter has come!"

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