

# Holiness in Crisis

by James Blaine Chapman

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of holiness and the role of the Holy Spirit in achieving it, highlighting the significance of the Pentecostal experience and the call to purity of heart.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:8, Luke 24:53, John 3:8, Acts 1:8, Acts 2:1, Acts 2:39, Acts 15:8, Acts 19:2, Ephesians 5:26

**Topics:** "Sanctification", "Holiness"

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## Description

James Blaine Chapman preaches about the significance of sanctification and the instantaneous step towards holiness. He emphasizes the need for a final step in the process of sanctification, which he believes is instantaneous and achievable through faith in Jesus Christ. Chapman discusses the two crucial crises in Christian experience: regeneration and sanctification, with sanctification being a subsequent experience after regeneration. He delves into the importance of purity of heart as a permanent factor in the Christian journey, highlighting the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit in achieving holiness.

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## Transcript

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 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 2:14).

And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith (Acts 15:8-9).

There is not, and never has been, argument as to gradual processes in sanctification. All admit and insist there are gradual processes. In fact, every motion of the Spirit in bringing conviction for sin and encouragement to seek the favor of God, and every act of the creature in yielding to the Spirit's call, are involved in the process of holiness. With proper understanding, the saying, "Regeneration is sanctification begun, and sanctification is regeneration completed," is a useful, because concise, statement.

But there is, and has been, debate as to whether there is a final instantaneous step in the approach to holiness. We leave it to those who hold that there is no such instantaneous step to marshal whatever arguments they can to support their negation. As for ourselves, we prefer to stand on the positive affirmation that there is a final step in the process, and that that step is instantaneous. We accept as fully

valid the old statement: "Sanctification is an instantaneous work of God's grace wrought in the hearts of the children of God subsequent to regeneration, on the merits of the blood of Jesus, on condition of faith, and by the direct ministry of the Holy Ghost coming in dispensational fullness."

If we proceed on the basis of logic, we are driven to one or the other of two positions: (1) that sanctification is an indeterminate process which is never completed, or (2) that sanctification is a process that does finally bring the Christian to the state and experience of holiness. I think there are few who are willing to submit to all the implications of the first mentioned thesis; for in that case one must find some way to explain how one in the uncompleted process can yet qualify for heaven, into which the Scriptures hold that only the holy can go. Regarding the second thesis, no matter how slow the processes of sanctification may be supposed to be, if ever (in this or in the world to come) those processes reach the goal of perfected holiness, there must be a last moment when sin exists and a first instant when it is all gone; and that can mean only that the last step, no matter how long delayed, is, to all intents and purposes, instantaneous.

If we develop the thought from the scriptural basis, then we have it unmistakably taught both in the specific words of the Scriptures and in the general implications of the Holy Book, that the prime condition for obtaining the state and experience of holiness is faith. And if faith is the condition, then whenever faith functions the conditions are met. Then since it is possible for faith to be exercised instantaneously and now, the result, the obtainment of a clean, holy heart, may also be instantaneous and now.

Widening the application of our thought just a little: there is no argument as to whether there are processes in salvation. All agree that there are processes, and no one is wise enough to set the limits at which the processes begin nor definitely as to just where they end. It is convenient, usually, for us to describe the life of probation as beginning with birth and ending with death. Then we usually speak of a certain undefined point on the journey as "the age of responsibility." And when any Christian undertakes to describe the influences which were effective in bringing him to Christ and keeping him in the way until now, he usually includes many unconventional items (items not directly connected with religion), some of them of a nature that the casual observer would very likely class among the things that hinder, rather than among factors that help.

Still, among the many meanderings of process, there is in every true Christian experience at least one crisis -- "the moment when I first believed." This crisis is usually spoken of as conversion, although of course that term is only one by which the experience of becoming a Christian may be intelligently described. On the human side, this experience is approached by repentance and faith. On the side of the divine answer come pardon and regeneration. The radical inside change is well described by the scriptural term "born again." By this is meant that the Holy Spirit has come, bringing life to the spirit that was previously dead in the sense of being separated from fellowship and vital relation with God.

Now there is another crisis -- that of sanctification -- which has been received by many Christians, and is the privilege of all Christians. This crisis is approached on the human side by consecration and faith, and is responded to on the divine side by the cleansing of the heart from "the remains of sin," and instantly filling the soul with perfect love. This is the only crisis in Christian experience that can properly be listed on the same plane with the new birth, and it was for this reason that John Wesley named it "the second blessing, properly so-called." That is, if being born of the Spirit is called a blessing, then being baptized with the Spirit is the second blessing. But we make no contention for the use of this particular terminology. There are those who reject the terminology on the ground that it is not scripture. We admit that it is not

scripture, but firmly believe that it is scriptural. Still we do not contend for the terminology, but only for the fact. Perhaps it would be better if Christians left off all terms that are wanting in the Scriptures -- terms like "eternal security," suppression, counteraction, and "positional holiness."

But the fact is that there are two crises in the full New Testament Christian experience: one is regeneration and the other is sanctification, and their order is invariably regeneration first, sanctification second; for no one ever gets sanctified before or at the same time that he is regenerated; but always, if he gets it at all, it is as a subsequent experience. These two crises are all there are until glorification, which is not due until Jesus comes in the glory of His second advent.

One of the two crises is just as capable of being instantaneous as the other. If a sinner may become a Christian in the twinkling of an eye, when he believes on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, a Christian may become a sanctified Christian in the twinkling of an eye, when he believes on the Lord Jesus Christ for full salvation.

The heart of our thesis is in the fact that the baptism with the Holy Ghost is the effective means of our sanctification, so that no one is sanctified until he has been baptized with the Holy Ghost, and no one is baptized with the Holy Ghost except that he is sanctified. This does not mean that the two terms are exactly interchangeable, for the baptism with the Holy Ghost is the cause of which holiness or sanctification is the result.

Properly speaking, there is just one baptism with the Holy Ghost, just as there is just one being born of the Spirit. We must not, therefore, argue that all sanctified Christians are filled with the Holy Ghost in the same measure, nor must we ourselves neglect to pray frequently, as the early disciples did, until we are "filled with the Holy Ghost" in a fresh and new way. "One baptism, many fillings!" But baptism always means cleansing, and the baptism with the Holy Ghost means the cleansing of our hearts by the Holy Ghost.

We come now for a brief study of the passage we have selected for a text, Acts 2:1-4, which describes the crisis that marks the beginning of holiness in the hearts of those who receive the Holy Ghost. As a mere approach to our subject, we assume that the evidence is convincing that the disciples were converted before Pentecost, and that any of them who had backslidden during the time of Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion had been restored to favor with God. We cannot now take time to examine this evidence; but it is so abundant that we think our hearers will, on the whole, admit it, and any who are uncertain are asked to go back and examine the matter again. We especially call attention to Luke's description of the group during the days of their prayerful waiting in that upper room. He says of them: "And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God" (Luke 24:53). Surely there can be no doubt that a group of happy, praying, praising people like that were abundant in evidences that they were true Christians, saved, and blessed with the divine favor.

The story then is that a group of one hundred and twenty Christians met in an upstairs room for ten successive days. In that room within the Temple enclosure, they spent their time in prayer and in praise and in waiting for the fulfillment of the promise Jesus had made to them that they were to be baptized with the Holy Ghost "not many days hence" (Acts 1:5). The story continues to tell us that on a given morning, the Day of Pentecost (marking the fiftieth day since Jesus was crucified), everyone in this group was the subject of a very remarkable experience -- an experience which the leader of the group, St. Peter, many years later identified with the obtainment of pure hearts (Acts 15:8-9). And what makes the story of interest to us is the fact that on the very same day on which this remarkable experience was received, the same

leader of the group who gave the interpretation of which we have spoken gave out the word that this experience is for all God's people. "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" (Acts 2:39). Whatever was essential in that Pentecostal experience is the heritage of all Christian people, and that brings the story to us as a vital message.

That we may the more readily see our privileges and claim our heritage, we will consider the story in two parts: first, the inaugural attendants, which were transient and metaphorical in meaning; and, second, the abiding result, which is in the nature of reality.

## I. THE INAUGURAL ATTENDANTS

The phenomena which attended the giving of the law at Sinai were impressive and full of metaphorical meaning. There were the flashing of lightning, the rumbling of thunder, the cloud of thick blackness, the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words. All these things served to emphasize the importance of the occasion and to give force and authority to the law. But these were not of the essential nature of the law, and they did not continue. They passed away with the occasion, leaving but their memory to the living and their history to the generations that were to follow. The law came in the midst of these phenomena, but it was not any part of them. The law was the essential and permanent body, while the phenomena were only the garments of the law. And although the phenomena were never repeated, the validity of the law continued unaffected, and was the authoritative word of God to men.

When Moses dedicated the Tabernacle, and again when Solomon dedicated the Temple, the glory of God filled the place, and was accompanied by thick clouds which filled the holy place as a token of God's presence and favor. This cloud did not abide, and did not return; but the Tabernacle and the Temple continued to be the "house of prayer for all nations," unaffected by the disappearance of the inaugural attendants.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, an angel came to announce the good news to the shepherds, a choir from heaven came to sing the first Christmas carol, and a star guided wise men from the East to the place where the young Child was cradled. These inaugural attendants passed, and were not repeated. But Christ remained to live and preach and heal and die for the sins of men, to ascend up on high to plead our cause before God, and He will come again in the glory of His second advent. The phenomena which attended His birth were wonderful, and full of metaphorical meaning, but they were not the Christ, and their disappearance in no way affected His presence or the glory of His permanent work.

These instances illustrate, and in some measure prefigure, what took place on that Day of Pentecost as regarding the phenomena which there appeared. These phenomena were impressive, served to enforce the solemnity and meaning of the wonderful occasion, but, like phenomena, always, they were transient, did not abide, and were not repeated; but the permanent meaning of the occasion did continue, and continued unaffected by the disappearance of the phenomena. The phenomena were three in number:

### 1. The sound as of a rushing mighty wind

Wind has always been a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Jesus used it thus in the third chapter of John, saying, "The wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The sound as of a rushing mighty wind was therefore the symbol of the Spirit's coming in power and fullness. The emblem fitted the promise, "Ye shall

receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you" (Acts 1:8). This symbol of power and unction came in connection with this first appearing of the Spirit in dispensational fullness, but it served its purpose in emphasizing and making vivid the Spirit's ministry in the new age. It did not continue, and was never repeated. But the Spirit, who came in the midst of the sound of the wind, but who was not a part of the wind, came to abide forever.

## 2. The cloven tongues like as of fire

Just as wind symbolized the reviving, invigorating unction of the Spirit, so fire symbolizes His purging, cleansing ministry. John the Baptist (Matthew, chapter three) called the baptism with the Holy Ghost the baptism with "the Holy Ghost, and with fire." But the form of words here, while unusual, is not by any means unknown, and the meaning has the force of an adjective, and is synonymous with "the fiery baptism with the Holy Ghost," that is, the purging, sanctifying baptism with the Holy Ghost. The double tongues as of fire which sat upon the head of each one in that little company (by the force of their double form) symbolized the complete eradication of sin that was to be the special mission and ministry of the Spirit on this and all succeeding occasions, when He should come in Pentecostal fullness. The phenomena which appeared to the sight of men, as the sound as of the rushing mighty wind had appeared to their hearing, were useful in emphasizing and illustrating the meaning of the Spirit's coming; but they were, like the wind, only accompanying attendants, and were not of the nature of the permanent presence of the Spirit. The appearance of the tongues of fire passed away with the occasion, and never came again.

## 3. Speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance

The record says that the sound as of the rushing mighty wind filled all the house (so evidently all heard it), and the cloven tongues like as of fire sat upon each of them (so that every one was touched;) but there is a limitation on the speaking in other tongues, for it says, "as the Spirit gave them utterance" (indicating that this was something less than universal among them).

And just as the wind and the fire were symbolic and transient, so likewise was the miracle of languages. The speaking here was not in any sense a speaking in unknown tongues. Quite the opposite, for the marvel was that all those who heard could understand. No listener was puzzled by the necessity of interpreting unfamiliar words, but all heard in the language wherein they were born. It is one of the strange anomalies of human reasoning that this wonderful miracle, the correction of the confusion of the tongues of Babel, should have become identified with speaking in tongues that no one can understand. It is like identifying midday with midnight, for here languages that all could understand are identified with languages that admittedly no one can understand.

The tongue is the instrument of publication. So as the sound of the wind symbolized the unction of the Spirit, the fire the purifying ministry of the Spirit, so the miracle of languages symbolized the universal adaptation and world-wide publication of the gospel. This meaning of the miracle of languages explains or at least suggests the explanation of the extension of this phenomenon to the Samaritan supplement to Pentecost, and to the Gentile supplement in the household of Cornelius, and to the little company at Ephesus; for in all these cases there is emphasis upon the design for extending the gospel to men everywhere.

The phenomena of divers languages, like the sound of the wind, and the appearance of fire, belong in the sphere of inaugural attendants. They were not permanent, and were not in the nature of the permanent factor of the Spirit's presence and essential ministry. Tongues, like the sound of the wind and the

appearance of fire, passed away to be repeated no more; but the Spirit abides, and His essential work in the hearts of God's people continues. In saying this, we do not suggest that there has been loss, but only that the transient must give way to the permanent, as it did at Sinai, in the Tabernacle and the Temple, and at the birth of Christ. We would not have it otherwise; for, if we should, we would be guilty of preferring the transient to the abiding.

## II. THE PERMANENT FACTORS

Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as the abiding Comforter, and Paul designated holiness as the "standing grace" or the experience in which Christians are to be established. The two ideas are complements. The Holy Spirit comes to abide, and by His abiding He keeps the heart holy.

In our study of the Pentecostal symbols we found reason to say that there was something associated with, and yet not identified with, the symbols that was to remain after the symbols had disappeared. After the sound of the wind had disappeared, the power and unction of the Spirit were to remain. After the passing of the miracle of languages, the universal adaptation of the gospel to the needs of men and the divine design to have it published were to last; and after the passing of the appearance of fire, purity of heart was to be the lasting heritage of God's people. Of these three permanent factors, our present thesis requires that we think more fully of the last -- the factor of purity.

In connection with our reading from the second chapter of the Acts at the beginning today, we read also from the fifteenth chapter, where St. Peter, years after the initial experience in the Upper Room at Pentecost, had occasion to appraise the permanent meaning of that experience, and he said its abiding effect was to purify the heart. Purity is an essential of essentials. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." No such statement is found recorded of any other grace or gift of the Spirit. Purity is the quality that brings us into fellowship with God here and into His glory in the world to come. If anyone can be sure his heart is clean and pure from sin, he need have no fear of what men or angels can do to him, and no dread of what God will do with him.

If I come to heaven's gate, find it closed, and have to wait;

I mean to keep believing just the same.

For if I am free from sin, they will have to let me in;

I mean to keep believing just the same.

The identifying of the purifying of the heart with the reception of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal fullness, as St. Peter does it in this fifteenth chapter of Acts, makes it clear that holiness is received in crisis, instantaneously, in the same instant with and as a consequence of the baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire. And thus, while holiness may be approached by many widely separated steps covering considerable space of time, the time when sin ends and holiness is perfected is that instant in which the Holy Ghost comes upon the praying Christian who has longed to be every whit whole, and has prevailed for the coming of the Spirit to make this estate real.

When Paul came to minister to the new converts at Ephesus, he began with a closed class meeting in which he sought to know the spiritual status of his hearers. His central question was, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" Those who try to get away from the implication that Paul was laying the foundation for preaching a second crisis to these believers do not help themselves by quoting the

Revised Version, which uses the form, "Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?" This last reading would help their cause if the answer had been, "Yes, we did receive Him then." But unfortunately for their argument, the answer was (again quoting the Revised Version), "We have not so much as heard that the Holy Ghost is given." So whether the question was since ye believed or when ye believed does not really matter, for in either case they had not yet received the Holy Ghost and were therefore to receive Him after they believed.

But this question centers attention on the crisis of holiness. Suppose the Apostle had asked, "Have you grown to any degree in holiness since you became Christians?" Then surely all would conclude that growth is the means by which Christians become holy, and that the goal is reached by a gradual process. Or suppose he had asked, "Do you cherish the hope that you will be made holy when you die?" Then surely all would suppose that there is no perfect holiness until death. But the logic is irresistibly in favor of a crisis, and in favor of an immediate crisis. "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" In simple words, in the light of Peter's interpretation of the abiding result of being baptized with the Holy Ghost, "Have you been sanctified by the baptism with the Holy Ghost since ye were born again?" And the negative answer of these twelve believers was followed immediately with the clearing of the way, and the introduction of an altar service at which all these new converts were brought into the blessing as a crisis.

I would not be impertinent. I would not appear to intrude into the privacy of anyone's testimony. But I would be true to everyone's soul need. It is not necessary that you should answer me right out, so that I and others here can hear your answer. But for God's ears, and for your own ears, answer this test question, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" Have you been sanctified wholly by the baptism with the Holy Ghost since you received the witness of the Spirit that your sins were forgiven and you were born of God? If your answer, like that of the men at Ephesus, is that you have not yet received this wonderful blessing, then there is no better time than now to obtain it. God does not require time for His part, and you can cut the time short in righteousness on your own part.

A seeker after this blessing was praying with deep mourning and weeping and long-drawn sighs. Old Brother Rogers asked him, "What is the trouble?" The man answered, "O Brother Rogers, I am dying out to the world, and it is a long and difficult task." But Brother Rogers replied: "No, brother, dying is not so painful and does not require so much time, unless you will it so. All you have to do to die is just to quit breathing. Quit breathing. Just leave it all with God. Leave it with Him now without delay and without regret. Put the world and all it involves behind you. Then trust God just now to come in His sanctifying fullness. If you die slowly, you die reluctantly and painfully, and even so, you do not really die until you give up and die. Give up right now and die, and in less time than it takes to tell it, the Holy Spirit will come and sanctify you wholly. The waiting and uncertainty are altogether on your part. The heavens bend low now with blessings ready to be outpoured upon you. This moment is God's moment, and you can make it your moment too. 'Let go, and let God.' "

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