

The Fullness of the Spirit

by Thomas Cook

The fullness of the Spirit is a birthright to all believers, and God is willing to give it to those who ask Him.

Scripture: Luke 11:13, John 7:38, John 14:16, John 20:22, Acts 2:38, Acts 8:17, Acts 19:2, Romans 8:9, Ephesians 5:18

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Sanctification"

Description

Thomas Cook preaches on the significance of receiving the baptism of the Holy Ghost, emphasizing that it includes entire cleansing from sin and is synonymous with entire sanctification. The Holy Spirit is the indispensable agent in producing spiritual life and renewal, filling believers with Divine love and excluding evil. While all Christians possess the Holy Spirit, being filled with the Spirit is a distinct experience that brings light, power, and love. The Apostolic Church's fullness of the Spirit serves as a model for Christians today, encouraging them to seek and expect the Spirit's fullness as a present experience.

Transcript

At the Council of Jerusalem (Acts xv. 8, 9) Peter, in giving an account of his visit to Cornelius, and the work of God upon the hearts of those assembled, said "And God, who knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did to us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." Two facts are here stated:-

1. That the same fullness of the Spirit which the apostles received at Pentecost was imparted to Cornelius and his household.
2. That the work wrought was the purifying of their hearts by faith.

The conclusion is inevitable that the baptism of the Holy Ghost includes entire cleansing from sin, or, in other words, that the fullness of the Spirit is a synonym for entire sanctification. Since there are but two forces which can sway the soul, the flesh and the Spirit, to be completely filled with either is to exclude the other. All inward renewal is the result of the Holy Spirit's operation; He is the indispensable agent in the production of spiritual life, both in its beginnings and in its fullness. Theologians speak of God, the Father, as the originating cause of salvation; of Christ as the procuring cause; of the Holy Spirit as the "executive of the Godhead." This latter phrase, coined by Dr. Hodge, of America, very aptly describes the work of the Third Person in the Trinity in the renewal and sanctification of those who trust in Jesus. He comes to the heart in sanctifying power, excluding the evil and filling it with Divine love, when we believe the blood of Jesus cleanseth us from all sin, just as He comes in regenerating power when we believe for forgiveness,

and are adopted into the family of God. The first point to be recognized, as dearly set forth in the Scriptures, is the fact that all Christians do possess the Holy Spirit. They have not only been brought under His influence, but they have received the Holy Spirit Himself. This is a truth which needs to be particularly emphasized. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." And the converse of this is necessarily true, that if any man belongs to Christ, he must have the Spirit of Christ. "It is remarkable," observes Professor Godet, "that the Spirit of Christ is here used as an equivalent of the Holy Spirit in the preceding proposition." Christ dwells in us by His representative the Holy Spirit, so that a Christ-possessed and a Spirit-possessed soul mean exactly the same thing.

When Ignatius was on his trial at Rome, he was asked by the Emperor, "What is the meaning of your name, Theophorus?" (God-bearer). He promptly replied, "He who has Christ in his breast." And all Christians are Godbearers, whether they realize it or not. The unspeakably glorious mystery of an indwelling Holy Ghost is the possession of even the weakest and most failing child of God. The mistake has often been made of looking upon the incoming of the Holy Spirit as an experience subsequent to conversion, as an arbitrary bestowment rather than a necessary vitality. But the Scriptures plainly teach that the Holy Spirit is a universal gift to all believers, one without which they cannot be believers at all. At the same time, we must recognize the fact that to possess the Holy Spirit is one thing, but to be filled with the Spirit is quite another. Before Pentecost the Holy Ghost had been given to the disciples. Christ had breathed upon them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." But Pentecost made an unspeakable difference to them. The visible tongues of fire were only emblems of what had passed within. What new creatures they then became! How their gross conception of Christ's kingdom was purged away, and how they were raised from earthliness to spirituality! Their intellects were flooded with Divine light, their souls throbbed with Divine sympathies, and their tongues spoke so wonderfully of the things of God, that all who had known them previously were amazed, saying, "What meaneth this?" They were all raised to a new altitude; a new energy and force possessed them. Each one became strong as an iron pillar, "the weakest as David, and the strong as the angel of the Lord." They met together as the sincere but timid and partially enlightened followers of Christ, but they left the upper room full of light, and power, and love. They were now filled with the Holy Ghost as an all-illuminating, all-strengthening, all-sanctifying presence. The baptism of fire has consumed their inward depravity, subsidized all their faculties, and filled to the full each capacity with Divine energy and life.

"Baptized with" and "filled with the Holy Ghost" are often convertible terms in the Acts of the Apostles, but it is instructive to note that they are not always so. The apostles received but one baptism but they were "filled" with the Spirit over and over again. The baptism of the Holy Ghost was, and still is, a sort of initiatory rite to the life of Pentecostal service, and fullness and victory. Christian life begins at Calvary, but effective service begins at Pentecost. Before Pentecost there was not much service rendered by the apostles that was worth the name. But with the Spirit's baptism they entered upon a new phase of life and service. The analogy of the sacrament of baptism connects the baptism of the Spirit with a new era in Christian life. Pentecost, and the visit to Cornelius, when the baptism of the Spirit is spoken of, were not only historical events, but great representative occasions, which may be held to typify and signify the beginning of the Spirit-filled life.

Almost all prominent Christian workers, whose labors have been pre-eminently owned of God, bear witness to the reception of a distinct definite blessing which they received subsequent to conversion, and which inaugurated a new era in their spiritual life. If questioned, they would give different accounts, probably, of how they received this experience, and describe it differently, but they suddenly became bold,

mighty, aggressive, and conquering. They had received their Pentecost, and the Holy Spirit was in them the fire of love, the light of assurance, and the unction of power.

As far as God is concerned, there is no reason why weary wastes of disappointing years should stretch between Bethel and Peniel, between the Cross and Pentecost. It is not the will of God that forty years of wilderness wandering should lie between Egypt and the promised land. In apostolic days there was generally a brief interval between conversion and the baptism of the Spirit, but new converts were introduced at once to this fullness of blessing, and taught to expect it as a positive, conscious, and present experience. Under the preaching of Philip in Samaria, many were converted, and "when they believed they were baptized, both men and women." The successive steps through which they passed are mentioned; attention to the word, faith, great joy, and baptism with water. But before they should be disheartened by difficulties and demoralized by defeat, Peter and John were sent unto them from Jerusalem for the special purpose of leading these newly-saved ones into the fullness of blessing. They prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost, and they laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

St. Paul's first question to "certain disciples," which he found at Ephesus, was, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" "Jesus hath sent me," said Ananias to the newly-converted Saul of Tarsus, "that thou mayest be filled with the Holy Ghost." How many backslidings would be prevented if we returned to primitive methods, and urged our converts to seek this experience at the beginning of their Christian life! None can deny that the ordinary Christian in our Churches, weakened as he is by doubt and palsied by fear, with his worldliness and backslidings, far more resembles the condition of the disciples before Pentecost than after it. Who can read the Acts of the Apostles without coming to the conclusion that the Apostolic Church enjoyed a much larger measure of the Spirit's fullness than is generally experienced by Christians today. We claim to be sharers in Pentecostal privileges, and yet how few enjoy the fullness of blessing which Christ is exalted to bestow! If we are not filled with the Spirit, at whose door does the blame lie? The question is not, "Has God given?" but, "Have we received?" The might of God was not exhausted in the day of Pentecost. That baptism was simply a pledge and earnest of what God intends to do for His people. We are still in the dispensation of the Spirit, and the promise still stands, "The promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts ii. 39). The promise is as far-reaching and extensive as the need, and means that by virtue of our new birth it is our individual privilege or birthright to be filled with the Holy Ghost. Each believer has the right to aspire to this, the right to pray for it, and the right to expect it today.

It is interesting to note the graduation in the teaching of St. John's Gospel. In chapter iii. we have the "life" in its beginning -- the new birth (John iii. 7). In chapter iv. we have "life abundantly" -- "a well of water springing up." We fill our cup and drink, and keep on drinking from this inexhaustible supply. Those who have learned to do this shall never thirst. The well is for the supply of personal need. But Christianity extends beyond the individual; provision is made for the needs of those about us. Hence we are taught in the seventh chapter that rivers of blessing shall "flow out" from all believers who are filled with the Spirit. "He that believeth on Me, as the Scriptures hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Blessing is promised here on a magnificent scale. Notice its hugeness, its Godlike vastness! "Rivers," not a babbling brook but rivers." What Divine prodigality! In this experience, "Grace, not in rills, but in cataract rolls." If it means anything, it means that there is no limit to the blessing God can send, through the feeblest of His servants. If they are prepared to receive what He is ready to bestow. There shall not only be fullness, but overflow. Spirit-filled believers carry life, and satisfaction, and gladness wherever they go.

Their presence is life-giving, fructifying, refreshing, even as a river which blesses as it flows. "Everything shall live whithersoever the river cometh." The weakest, feeblest member of the body of Christ may be so instinct with the most vigorous life that there shall come forth from him a holy river-like abundance to the blessing of the souls of others.

Let us not confuse this fullness of the Spirit with any particular modes of blessing. Sometimes His coming distills as the dew, or it may be like the gentle summer shower, or as the mighty rushing wind. Some have an overwhelming sense of His presence; to others He comes, as it were, without observation, in a quiet gladness and confidence. Souls are brought into His blessing with as much diversity as sinners are brought into pardon and peace. He who blesses knows best what we need, and will adapt His gifts to us with infinite wisdom. But though His modes of coming vary, when He does come in fullness to the soul, all its chambers are filled with light, and not a taint of impurity remains.

We often speak and act as if it were the most difficult thing in the world to obtain the fullness of the Spirit, and yet it is certain that there is no blessing which the Father is so ready to bestow upon those who ask Him as this very gift. More willing is He to give the Holy Spirit to each believer than a mother to give the healing medicine to her dying child, or a father to give food and raiment to his soldier son who has just returned from the war. "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"

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