

THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY GHOST.

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THIS is an expression very frequently heard at the present time ; but often used, alas ! with a painful lack of divine intelligence. Some will tell us that they have recently experienced it as a kind of second blessing ; others are crying to God constantly, both individually and collectively, for it, both for themselves and for the church at large. But what saith the scripture ? The baptism of the Spirit is first mentioned by John the Baptist in Matt. iii. 11, 12. "I indeed baptise 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 baptise 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." John's work was of a highly important character. He was Jehovah's

messenger, sent before His face (for it was no less a person than Jehovah Who was coming into the world) to prepare His ways. He declaimed sternly against the moral state of Israel and called for repentance and submission. Israel was not in a fit condition to receive the One that was coming. Though their national hopes were centred in Him, they were not ready for Him, and in spite of the Baptist's testimony, they discerned Him not, but refused Him and cast Him out to their own ruin. Therefore is God doing a work of another character in the world. The kingdom stands over, awaiting Israel's repentance and acknowledgement of Messiah; and God is gathering out those who are to be the heavenly joint-heirs with Jesus, baptising them by one Spirit into one body, as the apostle speaks.

In John's Gospel the Baptist speaks of the two-fold work of the Lord Jesus; He is the Lamb of God, the taker away of the sin of the world, and the Baptiser with the Holy Ghost. As to the first, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John i. 29). It is not that He was doing it when John spoke: the word is characteristic—He is the taker away. The work in virtue of which sin shall be entirely removed was accomplished at Calvary; but sin still remains in the world, consequently the verse in its full

application looks onward to the new heavens and the new earth, wherein righteousness will dwell. But the second work of the Lord Jesus is especially before us just now. "John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptise with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he which baptiseth with the Holy Ghost" (John i. 32, 33). The Lord Jesus was Himself sealed with the Spirit as man below; risen and in glory He is the Baptiser with the Holy Ghost.

That this was not accomplished until He was glorified is plain from Acts i. 5, xi. 16. In the risen state, alluding to John's words, He said, "Ye shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts i. 5). John added, "and with fire," but this the Lord omits, as having no fulfilment yet. Fire is an emblem of divine judgment, as the forerunner himself explained; and Christ is the divinely appointed administrator of it. Israel is "His floor," and at His return He will purge it, dealing with the apostate mass of the nation—the chaff to be burnt with unquenchable fire, and blessing the remnant—the wheat for the garner. It is a serious mistake that the baptism of fire is in any way going on now. It is judgment pure and

simple, but this is the day of grace. It has often been observed that when the Lord read in the synagogue (Isa. lxi.), He broke off in the middle of the second verse "the acceptable year of the Lord," leaving the words "and the day of vengeance of our God," for a day yet to come (Luke iv. 18-19). Some may have found difficulty in the fact that the Spirit's descent was accompanied by tongues of fire. There is a great contrast between the form of a dove as in the case of the Lord Jesus, and tongues of fire resting upon the disciples. The form was suited to the character of the recipients and to the character of the testimony they were to bear. The Lord's testimony was marked by grace. He came not to condemn the world, did not cry out and shout, nor break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax. Of such unassuming patient grace the dove was the suited emblem. The work of the disciples was of a very solemn, though blessed character. They charged sin home upon men, the word of God by their means, judging everything before it, while conveying eternal blessing to every soul who believed the gospel. They were to be witnesses—hence "tongues"; the testimony was to branch out to the Gentiles—therefore "cloven"; they were of "fire" for the reason stated. But this was in no way the baptism of fire as careful investigation of the passages will show.

The baptism of the Spirit was accomplished on the day of Pentecost. According to the promise of the Lord Jesus He came from the Father to abide in and with the saints for ever. He came to form a new thing in the earth—the church, the body of Christ. There was no such thing until the Lord took His seat on high and the Spirit descended. An earthly people were called and blessed temporarily, but union with Christ in glory was quite unknown. By the Spirit's descent the waiting disciples became what they were not before. Previously they were believers with Jewish hopes, after His coming, they were members of Christ's body, made one with Him, the glorified Head, by the baptism of the Holy Ghost. I do not say that they understood it all at first; indeed it is plain they did not. The truth of the one body—the mystery—was not declared until Paul was raised up; but the body existed from the day of Pentecost. It was for Paul to write, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free; and have all been made to drink one Spirit" (1 Cor. xii. 12, 13). What a place for the Christian! Accepted in His acceptance, loved with the love wherewith the Father

loves Him, blessed with His blessings. The saints were baptised with the Holy Ghost from the first and thus became the church, the body of Christ; and this is never repeated. Every fresh believer is brought to share in the blessing by the reception of the Spirit consequent on faith in the Gospel. Baptism in water introduces into the outward place of profession (true or false); the baptism of the Spirit brings the believer into the unity of Christ's body, with all its privileges and blessings. How deplorably has all this been overlooked and slighted. The church has forgotten her true relationship with Christ and has lapsed into the world. True, the Lord in His mercy has drawn attention in these last days to precious truths long buried and ignored; but how many, even now, are in the dark as to it all, and cry to Him for what He has already given—the Spirit from above!

That the church needs afresh to avail herself of the Spirit's presence and power we fully believe; but that the church needs a fresh baptism of the Spirit, as many say, is darkness and error as to one of the most vital truths of the present dispensation.

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