

The Cleansing Baptism

~Other Speakers G-L: Aaron Hills:

Acts xv. 8, 9, 11: "And God, which knoweth the heart, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in like manner as they."

Prejudice is one of the saddest evidences that ours is a fallen race. It is so universal that it seems as if none escape. Individuals are so prejudiced against each other that they will not co-operate for a common good. A Luther refuses to have any fellowship with a holy Zwingli. Families are kept aloof from each other. Churches often times will have nothing to do with rival denominations. In some countries there is a proud and bitter caste-spirit utterly foreign to the Gospel. Prejudice separates nations, till they watch each other with envious eyes across a Rhine. Races treat each other as if they were children of a different God, with nothing in common. It took two visions from Heaven to get Peter and his Gentile audience together. The Jews felt an ill-disguised contempt for all the rest of mankind. To the intellectual Greeks all the rest of the world were ignoble Barbarians. The white race today has much the same feeling for the black races.

The saddest form of prejudice and the most harmful is that against truth. It leads people to be inhospitable to any new revelation, or any new idea, or any advance in doctrine. It led the ancient Hebrews to reject Christianity. It keeps Mohammedans from doing it now. It led Roman Catholics to reject the light of the Reformation. It led Englishmen to persecute Wesley and reject the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit, and afterward to oppose him for advocating the doctrine of perfect love.

I beseech you to lay aside this prejudice. It is an imp direct from the bottomless pit. Do not think that your little denomination or school of thought has a corner on all truth. Keep an open eye for light from any quarter; stand four-square to all the winds of truth that blow. Banish from your heart at once and forever all unwillingness to hear about this Scriptural doctrine of sanctification. To oppose it is to oppose the Holy Spirit, who reveals it to our minds and brings the experience into our hearts.

In discussing the text observe,

I. God makes no difference. He "made no distinction between" Peter and his fellow-disciples, and Cornelius and his Roman soldiers. When it comes to appearing before God and pleading for mercy, no man living stands an inch above his fellows. Rich and poor are alike spiritual paupers. Educated and ignorant need alike the illumination of the heavenly Teacher. High and low alike need to be lifted from the pit of depravity and sin into which they have fallen.- All are in condemnation, that God may have mercy upon all.

A prominent lawyer and his wife in New York City, weary of the senseless round of fashionable gayety, went to a city mission for a new kind of amusement. They were both church-members, having a form of godliness without the power of it. They sat on the platform and listened to the Gospel preached to the vile men and women from the slums. When the altar call was made the filthy, vermin-infested creatures rose from the audience and started for the altar. The brilliant lawyer and his fashionable wife rose on the platform, both under conviction, and also started for the altar. The leader in consternation tried to keep them back: but they said, "We want that Savior, too." And there they knelt, the cultured and proud and richly dressed, kneeling with the soaks, and bums and harlots at the same altar, and found the same Christ. That Christian lady was afterward sanctified and is now managing one of the most effective homes for the fallen in New York City. God, when she was seeking mercy, put no difference between her and the woman of the street.

McNeil, of Scotland, was preaching a sermon from the text: "For there is no difference." At the close an aristocratic lady came up to him and asked: "Did you say there is no difference?" "Yes, ma'am, God says it." "Must I be saved just like my coachman, John?" "Yes, ma'am, if you are saved at all, you must be saved just like your coachman." "Then I won't have it at all." And away she went in a pet of indignation, taking a straight course to the pit. The same kind of pride sends multitudes to Hell. All the accidents of life, race and color and rank and station, are nothing to God in matters of salvation. There is no difference; "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

II. The text informs us that God knoweth all hearts. Nobody else does. We cannot tell the true condition of the heart of our most intimate friend. We may be a stranger to the one that lies in our bosom. Even inspired Samuel could not see the want of kingship in the eldest born of Jesse. God had to tell him, "Man seeth not as God seeth: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but, God looketh on the heart." Neither his father nor his brothers knew the kingly soul of David; but he was known to God.

We often do not know our own hearts. The old prophet said: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?" God let Elisha have a view of Hazael's heart, and the prophet began to weep. "And Hazael said, Why weepeth my Lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strongholds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child." And Hazael said, "But what, is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?" He could not believe that he could ever be guilty of such atrocities; but he lived to do them. He simply did not know his own heart, and its awful capabilities of wickedness.

But God is never deceived. He knows the sinner's heart -- its malignant depravity, its awful depth of corruption, its open hostility against God and righteousness, and its bent to sin. He knows a penitent, and "a broken and contrite heart" He will not despise. He knows and loves a justified heart, and sends the Spirit of adoption to lead it to cry "Abba Father." Men deny that there are any sanctified hearts: but God knows them. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."

III. The text declares, "God bare them witness." This is the peculiar work of the Holy Spirit, to bear witness to every person of the condition of his heart. Jesus said, "When he is come he will convince the world of sin of righteousness, and of judgment." It was the Spirit of God that made Felix tremble when Paul was preaching to him. The same power of God today makes men fall prostrate at the altar of prayer.

God bears witness to a man when he is backslidden. The Spirit-filled prophet said to David, "Thou art the man." When a man is justified, God lets him know it by a peace and rest of soul, and the whisper of the Spirit to his heart. And when a man goes across the Jordan into the Canaan of sanctification, the witness comes. "For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified, whereof the Holy Ghost beareth witness unto us." Yes, to the believers in the first century, and to believers in the twentieth century, the Holy Spirit bears witness of sanctification, filling the heart with joy unutterable and full of glory. It matters little what men believe or do not believe about the possibility of being sanctified in this life, if one has the abiding witness to the experience in his own heart. This is the privilege of every saint.

IV. God gives the Holy Spirit to believers in Pentecostal power. This blessing came to the one hundred and twenty in the upper chamber. Peter says, the same Spirit was given to Cornelius and his household: "Giving them the Holy Ghost as he did unto us." This Pentecostal baptism with the Spirit is poured out all around us today, and multitudes rejoice in the unspeakable blessing.

Some one asks, Why is this second blessing given? Several answers may be given to this inquiry.

1. The blessing was promised. God said by Joel, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." Isaiah prophesied, "I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring." Ezekiel declared, "I will put my Spirit within you." John the Baptist said, "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 fire." Jesus said just before He ascended, "John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." God has made all these promises, and He must keep His Word.

2. We need this cleansing baptism because of Inbred Sin. This is called in Scripture "the old man," "the sin that dwelleth in us," "the law of sin and death," "the carnal mind." "But," some one asks, Is not this removed, in regeneration?" No, indeed! The Bible and all the creeds teach us that this carnality or depravity is left in us after regeneration.

(1) Cumberland Presbyterian, Sec. 57, after mentioning the means of grace, says: "By such means the believer's faith is much increased, his tendency to sin weakened, the lusts mortified, and he more and more strengthened in all saving grace, and in the practice of holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

It seems, then, that Cumberland Presbyterians have "Tendencies To Sin And Lusts" after regeneration. Well, that is just what we are talking about.

(2) Lutheran Church, Augsburg Confession: "Since the fall of Adam, all men are born with a depraved nature, with sinful propensities ... That the Son of God truly suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried that he might be a sacrifice, not only for original sin, but also for all the actual sins of men. That he also sanctifies those who believe in Him by sending into their hearts the Holy Spirit."

That is exactly what I am trying to teach in this sermon, that all Lutherans need to be "sanctified by the Holy Spirit," to cleanse them from their "depraved nature and sinful propensities."

(3) The Reformed Church, Art. 4, Sec. 8: "But we acknowledge that this liberty of Spirit in the elect children is not perfect, but is as yet weighed down with manifest infirmity. (Rom.7: 4-25 and Gal. 5:17.) And they that believe according to the spirit of their mind have perpetually a struggle with flesh, that is, with corrupt nature." It seems then that members of the Reformed Church, after their regeneration still have to struggle with their "Corrupt Nature."

(4) Church of England, Ninth Art.: "And this infection of nature doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerated, whereby the lust of the flesh is not subject to the law of God; and although there is no condemnation for them that believe, yet this lust hath in itself the nature of sin."

My! What an admission! All the members of the great Church of England have in them "an infection of nature, and lust which is of the nature of sin." Well, I am trying to tell them in this sermon how to get rid of it; for they must be cleansed from it to enter Heaven.

(5) Protestant Episcopal Church: "Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam; but in the fault and corruption of the nature of every man that is naturally engendered of the offspring of Adam; and this infection of nature doth remain, yea, in those that are regenerated."

We could have hoped that the Episcopalians would miss it; but, according to their own confession, they have this horrible "infection," too, even after regeneration.

(6) Congregational, Boston Council, Burial Hill, 1865: "We confess the common sinfulness and ruin of our race, and acknowledge that it is only through the work accomplished by the life and expiatory death of Christ that believers in him are justified before God, receive remission of sins, and, through the presence and grace of the Holy Comforter, are delivered from the power of sin and perfected in holiness."

That is precisely the aim of of this sermon, to induce Congregationalists and all others, who have had remission of sins, to suffer the Comforter to deliver them from the "POWER OF SIN and PERFECT THEM IN HOLINESS." Forty years of intimate acquaintance with members of this denomination convinces me that they sorely need it.

(7) Salvation Army: "We believe that after conversion there remains in the heart inclinations to evil, or roots of bitterness, which, unless overpowered by Divine grace, produce actual sin; but that these evil tendencies can be entirely taken away by the Spirit of God."

That is a scholarly statement of the truth, and exactly what the modern Holiness Movement stands for. This is what we are trying to accomplish in the hearts of all believers.

(8) Baptist Church, "Christian Doctrine," by Dr. Pendleton, p. 300: "Regeneration breaks the power of sin, and destroys the love of sin, that whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin in the sense of being the slave thereof; but it does not free the soul from the presence and pollution of sin. Alas! the regenerated know full well that there is sin in their hearts."

Ah, me! the Baptists have it, too, in spite of regeneration and a first-class water baptism -- sin in their hearts." And nothing but the baptism with the Holy Ghost will take it away.

(9) Presbyterian Confession, Chap. 9, Sec. 4: "When God converts a sinner and translates him into a state of grace, he freeth him from his natural bondage under sin; yet by reason of his remaining corruption he doth not perfectly, nor only will that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil."

Wonder of wonders! These good Calvinists, in spite of Divine sovereignty, and unconditional election, and irresistible grace, still have "remaining corruption," and they will sin! But all this must cease before they can see God. When will it cease?

(10) M. E. Church (Wesley): "The generality of those who are justified feel in themselves more or less pride, anger, self-will, and a heart bent to backsliding." (Sermon, "Sin in Believers.") "But was he not freed from all sin so that there is no sin in the heart? I cannot say this. I cannot believe it, because Paul says to the contrary ...

And as this position that there is no sin in a believer, no bent to backsliding, no carnal mind, is thus contrary to the Word of God, so it is to the experience of his children. They feel a heart bent to backsliding, a natural tendency to evil, a proneness to wander from God. They are sensible of sin remaining in the heart."

Alas! even the Methodists, with all their universal atonement and free grace, have this abominable depravity in them, even after a wonderful conversion at the altar. And this is the reason Wesley gives for their awful backsliding. I heard an evangelist say this summer that in one of his late meetings one hundred and twenty-nine members of a Methodist Church sought and obtained restoration from backsliding. Evidently they needed a baptism with the Holy Ghost to take the awful "proneness to wander from God" out of them.

Now listen to the testimony of great religious teachers of world-wide fame.

(a) Dr. Charles Hodge: "According to Scripture and the undeniable evidence of history, regeneration does not remove all sin."

(b) Dr. John Hall, Pastor of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York: "No church can be found in a high spiritual condition, if the only definite standard is placed at justification. Usually it is in the experience beyond justification that little progress is made."

The experience beyond justification is sanctification, and there the true progress of the believer is to be found.

(c) Dr. Adam Clarke: "I have been twenty-three years a traveling preacher, and have been acquainted with some thousands of Christians who were in different states of grace, and I never, to my knowledge, met with a single instance where God both justifies and sanctifies at the same time."

This striking passage teaches a distinct second work of grace and it laughs in the face of this modern Methodist dodge, "I got it all at conversion." This was invented to make people at ease while rejecting sanctification.

(d) Joseph Agar Beet, the first Greek scholar of English Methodism: "It is worthy of notice that in the New Testament we never read expressly and unmistakably of sanctification as a gradual process." That is to say, we never grow into this blessing by gradual development. It is instantaneously received through the baptism with the Holy Ghost.

(e) The Elder Dr. Steven Tyng, Episcopal Church, New York. He said to those who were joining his church: "Though truly a child of God, you still carry with you a heart far from sanctified, a remaining sinfulness of nature in its appetites and propensities which demands unceasing vigilance. You cannot afford to relax your vigilance over these outgoings of your own sinful hearts."

What a declaration! "Children of God," yet "far from sanctified," and still possessing "sinful hearts." Oh, how we all need to be sanctified to be fitted for God and Heaven!

(f) F. W. Robertson, Church of England: "Two sides of our mysterious, two-fold being here; something in us near to Hell; something strangely near to God. In our best estate and in our purest moments there is a something of the devil in us, which if it could be known, would make men shrink from us. The germs of the worst crimes are in us all."

This precious man did not know the experience of sanctification. But his awful charge against human nature is literally true of all who are unsanctified. "Something of the devil is in us; the germs of the worst crimes are in us all."

Now, I have given you the testimony of ten leading Protestant denominations, and of six great theologians -- all agreeing that regeneration does not do for the heart all that needs to be done. It does not remove "carnality," or "depravity," the "infection of nature," "the proneness to wander from God," "the bent to backsliding," "the remaining corruption of soul." Call it what name these theologians will, there is a dark, troublesome, evil something infesting the soul, which must be taken out by another work of grace before we are prepared for Heaven.

3. We need this Holy Ghost blessing because the truly regenerated heart hungers for it. Christians who are truly living the justified life have longings for more of the good things of God. A Pisgah View of Canaan awakes a desire to breathe its vital air. A cluster from Eshcol makes one want to possess the whole vineyard. A visit with

Jesus leads us to pray Him to abide in our hearts. Blessed are they that thus "hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

4. We need the power for service that comes with this blessing. This was the promise of Jesus: "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you and ye shall be witnesses." Power to witness effectively for God is what the preachers need, and what all private Christians need. The churches are languishing and dying all around us for the want of it. Methodist ministers used to be cyclones of Holy Ghost power, and used to light the land with their revival fires, in those days when they were true to the doctrine and enjoyed the experience of holiness. But now, when so many are opposing it, two thousand and forty-six Methodist Episcopal Churches did not report one convert for the entire year of 1904. The Methodist ministers were never so well educated as now, and never so barren. The reason is, they are looking to everything else rather than to the Holy Spirit for power.

V. Notice now the conditions of receiving this blessing. Look at the story about Cornelius. He was "a devout man"; he "feared God"; he "gave alms," that is, his property was consecrated; he "prayed to God always"; he "worked righteousness"; he "was accepted of God." He was not a raw heathen, as opposers of the second blessing would have us believe. He had heard the Gospel before (see Acts x. 36-37) and accepted it. He had a fine record as a Christian, known on earth and in Heaven. And this is the primary condition of getting the blessing of sanctification. One must have, to start with, a "blood-red, snow-white, sky-blue" case of regeneration. Then let him obey God absolutely, consecrate wholly, and seek with all his heart by prayer and faith for this baptism with the Spirit, and the blessing will surely come.

Many seek, when not justified, the second work of grace, and get blessed. They mistake restoration for sanctification. Afterwards, finding that what they received does not measure up to sanctification, they are sadly disappointed, and say there is nothing in it.

When holiness is preached in a community, the most consistent Christians are the first to feel their need, and go to the altar. The reason is, they are the only ones that are ELIGIBLE to the blessing. They are walking in the light, and only such are prepared to seek sanctification.

VI. Notice what this baptism did for them. My text says, "it purified (cleansed) their hearts." This is a death blow to the suppression theory, which holds that the baptism with the Holy Spirit does not eliminate the carnal mind. All those evils the creeds and theologians complained of -- the "carnal mind," the "roots of bitterness," the "sinfulness of nature," the "remaining corruption," the "bent to backsliding," the inclinations to evil, "pride, anger and self-will," and "the germs of crime," -- are cleansed away by the Spirit. Regeneration cleans up the outward life: sanctification cleanses the HEART-LIFE. Blessed truth! Precious experience! Wonderful work of grace! It is the richest gift of God to the heart this side of Heaven.

VII. The text declares that this blessing is received "by faith." Many fail here. They seek sanctification by works. They spur themselves to perform deeds of mercy, give alms, visit the sick, minister to the poor, preach to the prisoners. But all such doings never brought peace to John Wesley; and never will to anybody else.

Others want to grow into it. But the growth theory has no Scripture in its support, and no witnesses. It is not found in the religious biographies. In all the holiness camp-meetings we have attended we never heard one soul testify that he had grown into sanctification. The reason is it is not obtained in that way. Once in our hearing an old lady eighty years of age arose and testified as follows: "I was converted when I was ten years of age. For sixty-nine years I tried to grow into sanctification and never came any nearer to it than when I started. I became weary of seeking it by the growth method, and last year I went to that altar and obtained it by faith in half an hour!"

Sixty-nine years against a half hour! What a contrast in methods. The truth is, the time element cuts no figure in seeking this blessing. It is received instantaneously by faith.

Others try to feel it first before they believe. They want the witness to help the exercise of faith. No, no! It will not answer. Faith is the supreme condition of receiving any blessing from God. The Infinite Sovereign will not reverse the order to please any of us. We seek and consecrate, then believe, then feel the witness and the experience. We are sanctified, as we are justified, "by faith."

VIII. Peter said to the Council in Jerusalem: "We believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in like manner as they." In other words, "Cornelius and his people first believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and were accepted of God; then they received the baptism with the Holy Ghost. These steps to salvation

were taken by the apostolic band; we first believed in Jesus, and afterward we had our Pentecost. This audience in Jerusalem can be saved in the same way, or any audience. This is the way to please God and be prepared for Heaven. Such is the Gospel that Peter preached in Jerusalem, and so he would preach today. Paul declared that "Jesus was made unto us wisdom from God, and justification, and sanctification, and redemption." We obtain all but the last this side of the grave.

In conclusion I observe:

1. The text proves (1) that regeneration is not purity; (2) that purity does not come by growth or development; (3) that there is a second work of grace subsequent to regeneration; (4) that it is obtained by the baptism with the Spirit through faith.

2. Do not say you do not need it. David might have said so once, when he was writing worshipful psalms and prayers for his people. But when he committed adultery and murder, he found out his need of sanctification and cried: "Purge me and I shall be clean wash me and I shall be whiter than snow."

Peter might have said so once. He did declare that "he was ready to go both to prison and to death with Jesus," and he would not deny him and forsake him, though all other men did. But the inconceivable sin was committed by him with cursing and swearing, before morning. He did not know his own heart.

Henry C. Morrison tells of a Kentucky father who went to town with his little boy to buy some agricultural implements. Riding out of town the little fellow began to cry because the father had not bought him some toy he had set his heart on. The father reached his big hand around and slapped him. They came home, ate supper, and the little boy and the family went to bed. In the middle of the night, the quick ear of mother heard moans from the little cot. She hastened to her darling little boy and laid her hand on him and found him in a raging fever. The father hurried to the town for the physician. The doctor, examining the boy, found marks on the face and asked the cause. "O," said the father, "I gave him a little slap as we were coming out of town." "Well, I find here a lump on the other side of his head." "Yes," said the father, "as I slapped him he fell over and his head hit a corner of one of the tools." "Well," said the doctor, "I am sorry to tell you; but it brought on concussion of the brain, and the little pet will be dead before morning." And it was so. That kind-hearted but quick-tempered man had killed his boy. What a pity he had not been sanctified just before he was tempted to strike that blow!

A doctor in Montague County, Texas, entertained Bud Robinson through a series of meetings, and worked night after night at the altar. He was an officer of the M. E. Church. All through the ten days, he argued that he did not need sanctification as a perfect work had been done in his heart at conversion.

The last night of the meeting he prayed with seekers until one o'clock in the morning. If any one had then told that doctor that in seven hours he would be a murderer, he would have laughed in his face, or thought him insane. But Bud Robinson left him at six in the morning to take the train. At eight the doctor, riding over his place, met a tenant and discussed a little matter of business with him. He told the tenant that he owed him one dollar and eighty cents. The tenant said it was one dollar and sixty cents. Words passed about the twenty cents, until the tenant called him a liar. The doctor, fresh from working at the altar some hours before, leveled his gun and shot his neighbor dead.

He thought he did not need sanctification! The murderous "Old man" was in him and he knew it not. He is in us all unless we have been and are sanctified by the Holy Ghost. As Robertson said: "Something of the devil" and "the germs of the worst crimes are in us all." It is a perpetual menace to our peace and our salvation. Let all who want clean hearts hasten to the altar.