

What Christ Said About Holiness

~Other Speakers G-L: Aaron Hills:

Pentecost filled the world with its fame. It was an epochal hour in Christian history. It might almost be said to have revolutionized the spiritual activities of the kingdom of God among men. It was the subject of prophecy hundreds of years before the eventful day came, and it is now pointed back to as the birth-hour of a dispensation of grace with the Holy Spirit as the reigning Executive of the triune God.

How remarkable it is that a day so prominent and eventful in the history of the Church of Christ should be a subject of contention and debate among the leaders and teachers of the Church! It would be amazing indeed were it not for the curious fact that upon every subject of human thought men have taken sides, and there have been diversities of opinion. A famous writer has said that if there were any conceivable motive for doing it somebody would rise up and deny that two and two are four.

Sometimes from a lack of careful thought on the subject, and often nowadays from a desire to escape the grip of the second blessing theory, men are telling us that the disciples were never converted until Pentecost; still others tell us that they were all backslidden and were only restored. These theories have apparently been invented in the interest both of the theory that "you get it all at conversion" and also the theory that "there is no such thing as sanctification."

Now the evidence is absolute and overwhelming that the disciples were Christians long before Pentecost; for

1. They had "forsaken all" to follow Jesus.
2. They were the children of God, for Jesus said to them: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." They were not then the children of the devil, but the children of God.
3. They were branches of Christ, the Living Vine, abiding in Him.
4. They had long borne a commission to teach and preach and work miracles in the name of Jesus. They even cast out devils -- a thing the children of the devil never do, for his kingdom is not divided against itself.
5. The world hated them "because they are not of the world." The world loves its own.
6. They were given to Christ, and He had kept them, and none of them were lost but one. If not lost, they must have been saved.
7. The world did not know the Spirit, but Jesus said to the disciples: "Ye know him; for he dwelleth with you."
8. Jesus had given them the sacrament to keep in perpetual remembrance of Him.
9. Jesus said of them in the intercessory prayer: "For they are thine. And all mine are thine . . . and I am glorified in them."
10. Again Jesus said: "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one."

No language could make it more evident that Jesus did not class His disciples among sinners. They were sincere followers of Jesus, and separate from the world.

After the Resurrection, every conversation with His followers indicated that He still looked upon them as His devout and sincere followers.

Now we are confronted by the striking fact that Jesus' prayed for these converted, regenerated disciples, that they might be sanctified. Furthermore, in His last interview He told them of the promise of the Father, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and He strictly charged them to tarry at Jerusalem and wait for it. He told them that it would endue them with power, and fit them to be witnesses in all the world.

He had previously commanded them, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." He had said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." This was the fountain of John Wesley's "Perfect Love," or "Christian

Perfection." The crystal stream of Methodism had its rise in the hills of heaven. The burden of Jesus' last conversation with His disciples in the upper chamber, on the eve of His crucifixion, was the ministry of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist had said: "I indeed baptize you with water.. . but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire."

Jesus' parting words to His disciples before He ascended were: "John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."

Great souls, when leaving their followers, do not speak on trivial themes in their farewell addresses. Nothing can be more evident than that Jesus regarded the Pentecostal baptism as a matter of the profoundest importance to His followers of all time.

On Pentecost the long-promised and expected blessing came. What happened? The advocates of the second blessing are not theorizing here. We walk on the firm ground of revelation and historic fact. The Apostle Peter was there, one who experienced the blessing and was an eyewitness to all that occurred there, and he bore this testimony before the council at Jerusalem as to what happened when the disciples, and also Cornelius and his household, were baptized with the Holy Spirit: "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 [cleansing] their hearts by faith."

Manifestly this was the cleansing or sanctification that Jesus prayed for in the upper chamber. It too the abnormal, the unnatural, the depraved out of the hearts or natures of the disciples. Peter evidently lost his cowardice and became more modest and humble. James and John lost the worldly ambitions that urged them to seek first and second place in the kingdom, and the passion that wanted fire to fall from heaven and burn up a whole village. Thomas lost the morbid tendency to doubt and disbelieve. Martha doubtless lost her fret about household cares; and all of them lost self-seeking worldliness and became that loving band of unselfish believers wholly devoted to Christ described in Acts, who have been the wonder of the ages.

Along with that heart-cleansing came an unusual power, an sense of the presence of God with them, an assurance of victory over men and devils, that wholly lifted them above all fear or anxiety as to results. Opposition did not check them; persecution did not stay them; threatening Sanhedrins, scowling priests, and persecuting civil powers could not stop their progress. All men suddenly became conscious that those humble, obscure, unlettered disciples had all at once become men of power. Something had happened in their spiritual experience, quite as striking and marvelous as their regeneration, that riveted upon them the gaze of the world, and made them in spiritual life and power wondrously like Jesus, their Lord.

The proof of this epochal second blessing experience in the Bible is absolute. That it sanctified or cleansed the cannot be denied. That it endued them with a superhuman power to propagate their faith is beyond question. That this blessing is for all believers, of every age, Peter distinctly declared at Pentecost.

In the face of these undeniable facts, how strangely out of place it is for religious teachers in the name of Jesus to make light of this Pentecostal experience, and sneer at this second-blessing baptism with the Holy Spirit! It is a sad accompanying fact that the ministers who do it are scarcely saved from the deserved contempt of the world for their barrenness.

This is the need of the hour in all our churches. Our ministers are conspicuously weak when they might be giants for God. Our churches confront an impudent, scorning world in conscious helplessness, when they ought to march against its spiritual foes, terrible as an army with banners. I am writing these lines in a parish in Louisiana where the worldly, tobacco-using pastor has rejected Pentecost; and as a consequence, he has not won a soul here in these last two years. The churches are clothed with barrenness everywhere, and these sanctification-despising, Holy-Spirit-rejecting, tobacco-enslaved preachers are letting the multitudes slip away from them into hell. A genuine modern Pentecost is the only known remedy for the disease of spiritual paralysis that is confessedly ravaging our churches. This is the Spirit's dispensation; and the preachers and followers of Christ must stop rejecting the Holy Ghost and welcome Him to their hearts in sanctifying power if they would see Christ enthroned in multitudes of people and the kingdom of God come with power among men.