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CONCERNING THE HOLY SPIRIT*

C. F. HOGG

Among the many popular mistakes about the Bible none is more common than the notion that it is a book full of miracles. Now a miracle may be defined as a putting forth of Divine power through a human agent, and in this sense—

Biblical Miracles

are comparatively few. With certain exceptions none of Israel's great men from Abraham to the Baptist, has a single miracle accredited to him. The Book of Genesis covers a period of two thousand five hundred years of human history, and while direct interventions of God in the affairs of men, such as the Flood and the Destruction of the Cities of the Plain, are recorded, there is no mention therein of the Divine power manifested through any human agent. When the Book of Exodus opens Israel is in Egypt in bondage to hard taskmasters, the knowledge of the God of their fathers almost lost to them. Then it was that God raised up two servants who were accredited to His people, and to Pharaoh, by 'signs and wonders great and sore', wrought through Moses and Aaron (Deut. 6:22). Through these men God delivered Israel out of Egypt. Centuries elapsed again without a recorded miracle until an era was reached in which Israel had backslidden into idolatry. The ministry of law and ritual having failed God introduced a ministry of prophecy through Elijah and Elisha, who also were accredited by the miracles God wrought through them. Another long interval followed and Israel, restored to the Land after exile, though purged from idolatry, was still alien to God in heart. 'The fulness of the time came' and God sent His Son into the world (Gal. 4:4). Once more the Divine power was put forth through two witnesses, His Son and His apostles. Again, it is foretold that just prior to the setting up on earth of 'the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ', He will once more raise up two

* This concludes the article begun in the July issue of last year, and continued in October issue.

witnesses and will accredit them by working miracles through them (Rev. 11:3, 6, 15).

It is clear then that miracles mark epochs in Holy Scripture, they are not distributed over the whole period covered by the Biblical History; were they common they would cease to be miraculous and would lose their value as evidence of a Divine mission. Neither may it be overlooked that miracles are also recorded therein which are wrought not by Divine but by demoniac power. (See Exod. 7:11 and 2 Tim. 3:8.) That God heals in answer to prayer need not be denied (Jas. 5:13-18) but in view of what is reported from such places as Lourdes in France, and from Carfin in Scotland, and of such things as come under the observation of missionaries in India, it would be quite unsafe to say that any case of healing is necessarily Divine. The Christian is called upon to be doubly vigilant: Satan is not merely a 'roaring lion . . . seeking whom he may devour', he is more dangerous when he masquerades as 'an angel of light'; when his servants 'fashion themselves as servants of righteousness' they are not so readily recognised, but they are the more to be feared (2 Cor. 11:3, 13-15, 1 Pet. 5:8). Plausible words, and high religious ideals take uninstructed souls captive. Our resources are the indwelling Spirit of God and 'the Scripture of Truth'; but together, not one without the other, as said Paul, 'I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace' (Acts 20:32).

In four places in the New Testament sanctification is said to be the work of the Holy Spirit. To the recently formed church at Thessalonica Paul gave a succinct account of the way of God with those who composed it: 'We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, for that God chose you from the beginning in

Sanctification of the Spirit

and belief of the truth: Whereunto He called you through our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ' (2 Thess. 2:13, 14). Their salvation did not originate with themselves but with God Who had chosen them to be the subjects.

of His grace. The first step toward the accomplishment of His purpose for them was 'the sanctification of the Spirit', they were set apart for God by Him. The next step was in the Providential over-ruling that brought Paul to their City, when he had little mind to come (Acts 16:6-10) so that they might hear the Gospel. Finally, the salvation for which they were chosen is to be consummated by their 'obtaining the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ', a view of salvation too little remembered, too little proclaimed.

1 Pet. 1:2 follows the Thessalonian passage closely, 'elect . . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the Blood of Jesus Christ'. The purpose is the Father's, His is the electing grace; in order to carry that purpose into effect, in the first place men are set apart for God by the Holy Spirit. In due time there follows the hearing of the Gospel and its call to repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. To this the elect render 'the obedience of faith' (Rom. 1:5; 16:26, cp. Acts 5:32; 6:7, 2 Thess. 1:8, Heb. 5:9) which brings those who render it under the shelter of the Blood of Christ. Here the reference is to the Passover in Egypt where the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the door posts and lintels of the houses of the Israelites. (Ex. 12:7, 13).

The third passage is Rom. 15:16 where, reviewing the ministry committed to him, Paul speaks of the grace of God that made him a 'minister (*leitourgos*, used of one who discharges public responsibilities) of Jesus Christ unto the Gentiles, ministering (*hierourgeo*, ministering in sacrifice, R.V.M.) the Gospel of God, that the offering up (as a sacrifice is offered) of the Gentiles might be made acceptable, being (having been, *perf. part.*) sanctified by the Holy Spirit'. Here the Apostle represents himself as a priest offering to God the Gentiles, who had already been sanctified, or set apart for God by the Holy Spirit. Cp. John 10:3, 4, 16 and Acts 18:10.

The fourth passage in which the sanctification of the Spirit is mentioned is 1 Cor. 6:11. The preceding context describes the characteristic vices of the Gentile world, which, says the

Apostle, if a man professing himself to be a Christian were to practise would make it manifest that, notwithstanding his profession, he had, in fact, no inheritance in the Kingdom of God at all. In these evils some of the Christians at Corinth formerly shared; they still needed to be warned against complicity in them. 'But', he writes, 'ye were washed', or, more accurately, as in R.V.M., 'ye washed yourselves'. The only other place in the New Testament where washing is associated with sins is Acts 22, 26, where also the verb is in the middle voice, denoting something voluntarily procured for oneself*. This is the case with the word 'baptize' in the same verse, 'get thyself baptized'. But in no sense did Saul's (Paul's) baptism procure for him the forgiveness of his sins, calling upon the Name of the Lord did that, for 'Whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved' (Rom. 10:13). His calling upon the Name at once procured his forgiveness and qualified him as a fit and proper subject for baptism. So also the saints at Corinth, they too had washed away their former pollutions by calling upon the Name of the Lord.

The remainder of the verse is a chiasm or x formation, one of the many found in both Testaments. For clarity it may be set out as under:

1. Ye were sanctified.
2. Ye were justified.
2. In the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.
1. In (or by) the Spirit of our God.†

Those who had washed themselves by calling on the Name of the Lord were thus seen to be the subjects of the electing grace of God, who, in pursuanœ of the Divine purpose, had been set apart by the Holy Spirit. On the same condition they

* Rev. 1: 5 the true reading is almost certainly "loosed," as in R.V.M. Rev. 7: 14 is plainly symbolic. In Tit. 3: 5 the word translated "washing" is that used of the layer, see margin. It is a symbol of regeneration, "the washing of regeneration and (that is to say) the renewing of the Holy Spirit."

† For examples of this figure see Isa. 55: 8, 9, Ezek. 44: 23, Matt. 13: 15, John 10: 14, 15, Rom. 10: 9, 10.

had been justified by 'one act of righteousness' on the part of Christ, that is by His obedience unto death (Rom. 5:18, 19). Thus in conformity with the structure of the verse (in which the first line is read with the fourth and the second with the third) and in harmony with the Scriptures already considered, we understand that the believers at Corinth had been set apart for God by His Holy Spirit, and had been justified by the Blood of Christ, that is, by His Death. Of them the Lord had said to the Apostle. 'I have much people in this city' (Acts 18:10, Rom. 5:9, 10).

According to the Scriptures thus briefly reviewed the sanctification of the Spirit is His sovereign act by which the believer, the subject of God's electing grace, is set apart for God, an act which preceded even his hearing of the Gospel; undated indeed inasmuch as it precedes 'the foundation of the world' (Eph. 1:4). Let us who have believed heed the exhortation the Apostle bases on these facts and stand fast, and let us hold (fast) the good word of God. It is through these things that our Lord Jesus Christ, and God our Father, who gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, establishes our hearts in every good work and word (2 Thess. 2:17).

Some general but quite clear.

Deductions from Scripture

may be set down here. The first of these is that the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, is the sole object of faith. Nowhere are we told to believe on or in the Holy Spirit. The second is that prayer is not properly addressed to the Spirit. When Paul asks that his readers may be strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man, he addresses his prayer to the Father, not to the Spirit (Eph. 3:14-16). The third is that there is no warrant for asking God for the gift of the Spirit; the Spirit was sent and came at Pentecost, and, as we have already seen, He makes the bodies of all believers individually, and the churches of His people collectively His dwelling place on earth. See 1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:19, 20. In Luke 11:13 the Lord is recorded as saying 'your Heavenly Father (will) give (the) Holy Spirit to them that ask

Him.' The article is not present in the original, generally an indication that not the Person is intended but His gifts. This is confirmed by Matthew's account of the same occasion which reads (ch. 7:11) 'your Father which is in Heaven (will) give good things to them that ask Him.' 'Good things,' not necessarily of this life, material good, but good things of the Spirit, of the life eternal, what Peter (2 Ep. 1:3) calls 'things that pertain unto life and godliness.' When the Holy Spirit thus explains His own record of the words our Lord spoke, we may not attach to them any other meaning. Nor is it stated or implied that any of those who are said to have been 'filled with the Spirit' had sought that filling, or that they had complied with any condition necessary to qualify them for it. In each case it is clear that the filling was the sovereign act of the Spirit Himself. 'The Spirit breatheth where He listeth and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth' (John 3:8. R. V. M., cp. Ecc. 11:5). No one is said to have prayed for that 'filling,' no one was kept waiting for it. There is no mention of any one being 'baptized with fire,' nor of physical thrills or ecstasies, accompanying the filling. Saints and sinners alike do well to beware of trusting their 'feelings' in preference to the 'word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God' (Matt. 4:4). It is not recorded that any Spirit-filled man spoke of himself as having been 'filled'; self-advertisement is a subtle motion of the flesh, often disguised under the name of 'testifying.' Lives lived unostentatiously, and often in physical weakness and suffering, but lived to please God, is the testimony that glorifies Him, and cheers, refreshes, and encourages others.

The tragedy of human life lies in the conflict between the will of the Creator and the will with which He has endowed His creature, man. This, His supreme gift, will and freedom to use it, when it is surrendered to Him Who gave it brings to man his highest felicity; but the deepest misery when it is devoted to Self. God gave the gift in good faith, and respects it even when used against the Giver. The conflict has its most poignant expression in the words of the Lord, 'how often would I . . . and ye would not', and again, 'ye will not come unto Me that

ye might have life' (Luke 13:34, John 5:40). What God now asks of men is that, as repentant sinners, they accept His 'free gift', which is 'eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 6:23). To those who accept this gift the will of God becomes 'good and acceptable and perfect' and they learn to subject their wills to His, and to say 'Thy will be done' (Matt. 6:10, Rom. 12:2). What that will is for the Christian was declared by the Lord on the occasion on which He first spoke of His approaching death, 'If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me' (Luke 9:23). But how shall men who are 'slaves to sin' respond to such a call? Here we are met by the emancipating word, that since Christ died for us and rose again, 'sin shall not have dominion over' us, a deliverance to be made good in experience by 'the Holy Spirit Whom God hath given to them that obey Him,' the Spirit Whose 'controlling power' made us 'free from the controlling power of sin and of death' (Acts 5:32, Rom. 6:14; 8:2). Salvation is not merely deliverance from the judgment of God upon sin, it is deliverance from sin and from sins, as the name 'Jesus' declares (Matt. 1:21). In the life of the Christian the conflict is renewed; are we willing to say 'No' to self, to take up the cross the Lord has placed in the way in which we must walk if we are to follow Him? The power, we plead, is lacking, so it is in ourselves, but the obedient find the Divine provision adequate to every need. 'No word from God shall be void of power' (Luke 1:37). The words find a significant illustration in the incident of the man with the withered hand, to whom the Lord said 'Stretch forth thy hand' (Mark 3:1-5). He might have pleaded that obedience was impossible, that he was unable to stretch it forth. Happily for himself, he simply obeyed, did what the Lord told him to do, and made the discovery we too may make, that with obedience comes the power to obey. Where there is the will to obey the power is never lacking. Our part is to give heed to the words, 'whatsoever He saith unto you, do it', and like the servants at Cana, to do it 'up to the brim' (John 2:5, 7).