

Truly we should not think it strange when difficulties come our way. Rather we should rejoice and be exceeding glad realizing that it is God who is working in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. It is the loving hand of the Heavenly Father preparing, purifying, and refining us for that glorious day. I believe that if you are able to turn your heart and give thanks to God for the things that He's doing in your life that you will come to know Him in a way you have never known Him before. If you can praise Him and thank Him for the work that He's doing, instead of murmuring and complaining as the children of Israel did in the wilderness, you will find a supernatural supply of inward strengthening.

Actually, to refuse to recognize the hand of God is rebellion - but to submit to it, thank Him for it and look for His hand in it is the kind of obedience that He desires. And for those who do turn to Him in this way, Christ has a special blessing. He will come and supply them with all that they need to endure in the face of the severest tribulation. Brother in Christ, do you think your wife is difficult? Sister, do you think your husband is unbearable or that your kids are too much? Do you think that your job is the problem or that you don't make enough money? Let me tell you, God is working in your heart. He is doing something of eternal significance and value. Don't be fooled by the outward appearance of these things, but rather turn to see the invisible hand of God working in your life.

Almost without exception, I have found that when I have had difficulties with other people, I myself had something that needed to change. Many times I have discovered that there was something in me on which God was working - something in my own heart that needed purifying. And I have found that when I got my heart right with God, somehow miraculously, the other people around me with whom I was having difficulty begin to change also. The scripture truly says: "first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye (Mt 7:5)."

Jesus promises us the baptism of fire. It is through this fire we must be passing if we are going to be ready. We are told that one day when we stand before Him we will be tried by this very same fire (I Cor 3:14). If while we are on this earth we yield to Him and allow Him to purify our lives, the fire of His presence will find nothing to kindle upon in that day. We can stand unscathed and unashamed before our God.

I'm going to close with a picture which I really like from the book of Revelation (Rev 15: 2-4). This passage is about some saints of God who were standing on a sea of glass mingled with fire, singing a victory song to the Lord. When this world is finished, God's judgment upon rebellious men will have taken two forms - water and fire. But here we see some of God's people who have been so

purified that they can stand in the midst of the sea of glass mingled with fire and sing His praises. The judgments of God have found no place to kindle upon them. They are so purified, so perfected, so yielded to Him, that in the midst of the trial of fire, they can sing and worship. Brothers and sisters, can you do that today?

May the Lord make us some of these

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Over the past several years, the baptism of the Holy Spirit has become a popular topic. It has been taught, debated and discussed by almost everyone in the Christian community in some fashion or another. In fact, it is difficult to find a believer anywhere who does not have some (usually strong) opinion about this subject. Even though this is so, it appears that there is an essential aspect of this baptism which has been neglected - that is the baptism of fire.

John the Baptist declared: "I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his threshing floor (Lk 3:16,17)."

Here we find a strange pronouncement. John says that God's Son, Jesus Christ the Savior of the world, is coming and when He comes He is going to baptize men and women with fire. What is the meaning of this fire? Why is it that God would want to pour out fire from heaven upon those who believe in Him? This is what we will be investigating in the remainder of this tract.

God desires to purify His sons. He not only wants to gather from among men those who will believe, but He also desires to purge and purify them so that when they appear before Him, they will be holy. I believe that this baptismal fire is the same as the refiner's fire mentioned elsewhere in the scriptures (See Mal 3:2,3; Zech 13:9) which is an intensely hot, glowing bed of coals. It is this kind of fire that a gold or silversmith would use to purge all the impurities from the metals with which he is working. In this same way God is baptizing us with His fire to cleanse us, to purify us and to make us ready for His appearing.

## FIERY TRIALS

Now what does this mean to us as believers today? Peter tells us that we should not think it strange concerning the fiery trials which come upon us (1 Pet 4:12). We as believers should not be amazed if in our walk with the Lord we go through times of intense difficulty or suffering. If while we are loving God with all our hearts and seeking to serve Him we find ourselves surrounded by adversity, distress and trouble we should not be surprised. This is simply the trial of our faith (1 Pet 1:7). Once we receive the Lord Jesus Christ, this is just the beginning of a lifelong process during which God purifies us inwardly. Jesus Christ came not only to forgive us for our sins, but to deliver us from sin. Since His resurrection from the grave He has the power not only to forgive sins but to cleanse from sin, causing us to be as He is so that we no longer live in sin. His life living within us gives us the power to rise above sin. I am not saying here that a purified Christian would never sin, but that the tendency to sin is taken away. The desire for sin is removed and, to a great extent, their life is perfected. Unfortunately, this kind of holy living is neither cheap nor easy. In order to attain it, our life must be tried. No one comes to holiness naturally, but only after the severest testing. The things through which God is putting you today are exactly what you need in order to be purified. Don't think that your situation is too hard or that it is something from the devil, something ungodly. No, where you are today is exactly where God wants you to be. The trials which you are enduring are perfect for you in your situation. I believe it was the famous preacher Charles Spurgeon who said something like this: "If God, in His infinite mercy, could find a better place for you to be today, He would have put you there." The difficulties through which we are passing are designed by God to reach into the core of our being and touch those things which He knows are still fallen, natural and living in enmity with His nature. If we, by our own power, can extricate ourselves from these dealings - if we can find some way out - this relief will only be temporary. God will again work in our situation and in our environment to bring us back to that point where He can put pressure on that particular area of our life which needs refining.

Some believers for example, while having difficulties in their marriages, have thought that divorce would be a way of escape from the pressure in which they found themselves. Later they realized that this was the wrong thing. Second and third marriages began to fall apart in the same way. No happiness or relief is found in some cases because those people were simply running away from the hand of the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, if we could only realize that the extreme circumstances through which we are passing are from Him, and that He is allowing these things to come upon us because He loves us and He desires that we would be holy. He is pouring out

His baptism of Holy Spirit fire upon us to purge our lives, to purify us, to burn within us so that only that which is of eternal substance will remain. Instead of complaining and seeking a way out of our trouble, we need to learn to recognize the work of His hand and to thank Him for it.

## GIVING THANKS

The scripture reads, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God concerning you." In another place it says, "And be ye thankful." If by His mercy, in the midst of the fire and the torment of some present circumstance in which we find ourselves, we would turn our heart to God and say, "Lord, thank you. Thank you for allowing me to undergo this testing so that I might be purified, so that the dross in my life can be burned away, so that the evil in which I live can be removed and I can be like You." If we can do this, we will find the help that we need. The scriptures tell us that we, God's people, are made perfect through suffering.

A friend of mine once told me something which I think I will always remember. She said, "You know it's not how you act, but how you react." The Christian life doesn't consist of behaviour patterns, but of what we actually are within. It's very easy for us to deceive ourselves and others by pretending to be very holy and religious. But nothing will expose our inward condition more than a little pressure. When our wife is angry, the children screaming, the dog barking and the faucets leaking, then what's inside us comes out. Many times God will apply pressure to our lives to show us just exactly what we're like, to reveal to us the kind of things that are lurking in our hearts. He does this for our own good. God is not punishing us. He is loving us. In His infinite mercy He is causing us to see the evil in our own heart so that we can turn it over to Him. Once we are so exposed, we can ask for His forgiveness and yield that portion of our life completely to Him. Then we can begin cooperating with the workings of His Holy Spirit as He cleanses that sin from our lives. Brothers and sisters, this is God's mercy. The circumstance in which you find yourself just may be the hand of God's love, the expression of His heartfelt affection for you, so that you can gain an eternal weight of glory.

Of course, no suffering seems like very much fun when we're going through it. It is usually difficult and painful. Often we wish we could get out of the situation and away from the things that are causing us discomfort. But the true answer rarely lies in escape. It lies instead in turning our hearts to the Lord and finding, like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the midst of the fiery furnace, "One like unto the Son of God (Dan 3:25)." If when we find ourselves in the midst of fiery situations, we yield to the Lord and open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, He will fill us, He will strengthen us; He will supply us just enough so that we can get through. This is the real substance of overcoming. Not that we escape, not that we learn how to manipulate our environment to keep from being touched by any pain or suffering. But that we learn in our trials and tribulations to enter into the Spirit, to find a rest in God and to be lifted up above our circumstances by faith.

Many great saints of God down through the centuries have been imprisoned, beaten or even tortured for their faith, and yet have found in the midst of these things a great uplifting. They have found themselves being borne up above their circumstances and their situations. Some while being burned at the stake experienced their soul being filled with joy and sang praises to their Savior. This is genuine overcoming. We must realize that it is not enough when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances, simply to undergo. It's not enough just to wait it out and get through to the other side. This kind of Christianity actually does nothing for us. It is only when we enter into God in the middle of our temptations that we are gaining anything. Simply making it through to the other side does not cause us to be more like Christ. Even unbelievers go through painful trials. But when we turn our heart to Jesus, when we thank Him for what is happening, when we yield our being wholly to Him, then and only then is there any eternal change wrought in our being.

## FIRE FOR PURIFYING

Jesus said: "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled (Lk 12:49 NIV)!" There is no doubt that God wants to purify His children. He not only wants to save them from what they have done but also from what they are. He wants to purify them inwardly so that they will be of the same nature and substance as He. Ephesians says "that He might present it the Church to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; that it should be holy and without blemish." Such a thing requires the baptism of fire. Not only must we be baptized with the Holy Spirit to fill us with God's life and power, but we also must be baptized with fire - that purifying, refining, inward burning which melts us, changes us, burns away the dross and causes us to be like Him.

When Jesus Christ comes again to dwell among His people, He wants to find them ready. He desires them to be the kind of people He can trust and use. He is longing for those with whom He can have intimate communion. No doubt all of us find these sufferings and trials difficult. Certainly this way is not easy. However, we should know that this purifying process, the trying of our faith, is much more precious than any earthly substance. It is working for us an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The sufferings through which we pass in this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed. Our few short years on earth are just a time of preparation for something that is coming which will be of great and unimaginable joy. Those who submit themselves under the mighty hand of God will find some day that it has all been more than worth it. What God has wrought in them will have eternal consequences. They will be the ones who are able to experience freely all of what God has prepared for us.