

They had not received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. The promise of the Father had not been fulfilled in them. That they had felt, to some extent, the influence of the Spirit, there is no reason to doubt. No man calleth Jesus Christ Lord but by Him; and the fact that they had accepted the Divine Redeemer as Lord is proof that they had been moved by Him. They had believed—and we have no reason to doubt that they had believed with the heart unto righteousness—to the saving of their souls. They were, to use the phraseology of our time, Christians—imperfectly instructed Christians, it is true, but, nevertheless, Christians. And yet they had not the full measure of power and blessing which it was their privilege as Christians to enjoy. The characteristic gift of the new dispensation they had not received. That of which John spake when he said of his Divine Master, “He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire,” and of which Jesus Himself spake immediately before His ascension, when He said, “Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence,” had not been realized by them in their own personal experience. They had not received their pentecost.

This story teaches us, too, that without this baptism of the Holy Ghost the believer, though he be a disciple, is not complete. He has not yet entered into the power and privilege which properly belongs to the new dispensation. He has not come up to the standard of measurement which belongs to the Christian age. He does not enjoy what it is the privilege of the New Testament saint to enjoy; he is not prepared to do all that the New Testament saint, when fully equipped for his work, may do. There is no complaint made in respect to the consistency of these disciples’ lives. For aught that we can learn from the narrative, their morals were correct, their deportment irreproachable. Nor is there any complaints made of their habits of devotion. For aught that we know, they did justly, loved mercy, and walked humbly with God. Their knowledge, it is true, was defective, but this defect could have been easily remedied by appropriate instruction. Under the instruction of such a teacher as Paul, they would have soon been put right, so far as this was concerned. It may be assumed, therefore, that however well instructed they might have been, and however faultless might have been their external life, according to the apostolic standard they would have been defective Christians until, in some further sense, they had received the Holy Ghost.

It is evident, too, that this reception of the Spirit is not something that ought to be insisted on as a condition of membership in the Christian Church. I heard an estimable Baptist minister,