

THE HOLY GHOST.

A PRACTICAL PAPER.

St. Paul, by his question at the commencement of the nineteenth chapter of the Acts, indicates very plainly that the reception of the Holy Ghost is the purpose of the Gospel, and by his further question to those disciples at Ephesus he declares that this possession of the Holy Ghost is the benefit to which the institution of Christian baptism points.

"Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" or "Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?" is the question that ought to ring through the churches of Christ.

It is plain from the subsequent narrative in this chapter that even the intelligent administration of baptism by an apostle did not confer the Holy Ghost; and in the eighth chapter of Acts we likewise read that special prayer was made by the Apostles Peter and John, for disciples at Samaria, "that they might receive the Holy Ghost, for as yet He was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." (An exact translation of this passage throws light on baptism—"For not yet the Holy Ghost was fallen upon any of them; but only having been baptized they began to be for the name of the Lord Jesus.") In these two instances, at Samaria and at Ephesus, the Holy Ghost was given through the laying-on of hands, but in the case of Cornelius and the Gentiles "the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the Word" while Peter was speaking, and there was no occasion for the intervening solemnity of a special application to God for the gift of the Holy Ghost. In the same way, St. Paul, in Galatians iii. 2, appeals to the recollection of the Galatians that they also had received the Spirit directly "by the hearing of faith." Thus we learn from signal instances that the reception of the blessing itself is all important, although the circumstances which immediately preceded its reception were not always precisely the same.

The possession itself is vital. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His;" but the antecedent formal means through which it would seem to have been conferred are variable in some respects. The real prior conditions for obtaining this possession are essential and invariable, viz., the coming of God's grace to a soul, and the willing and obedient reception of that grace by the

believing soul. It is God's will "that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." (Galatians iii. 14.) The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of grace. When the Spirit of grace had been received, under the preaching of the word of God's grace, then the laying-on of hands (in order to the reception of that Spirit) was entirely superseded and dispensed with. But even then the recipients of the Spirit were ordered to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, to manifest their devotion to the Son, through whom they had received the Spirit of the Son. And where Christ was first preached with a view to the reception of this gift, St. Peter urges the Jews with imperative directness—"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." The difference in the tenses here declares an instant requirement for a consequent blessing.

"The remission of sins" is the present purpose aimed at in the injunction, "Change your minds and be baptized;" and "the gift of the Holy Ghost" is the blessing promised thereafter.

Baptism is the ceremonial token of that remission of sins which is preached to sinners, and promised to believers in the name of Jesus Christ. This "remission" is rather dismission, meaning both forgiveness and removal. Our Lord's final injunction to His disciples was "that repentance for the remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations." Baptism, as God's appointment, ratifies this grace, which comes to sinners, and which commands repentance and offers Christ. This ordinance is a standing sign of the Gospel of the grace of God. It has been well called "a visible Gospel for the world." But the gift of the Spirit is an ulterior blessing. It is "the promise of the Father," which is dispensed by the Son. (Acts i. 4, and ii. 33.) The Holy Ghost is the cause of holiness; and holiness is the divine nature. The precept, "Be ye holy, for I am holy," can only be obeyed in the strength of God's own Spirit. And this Spirit is promised particularly to those who ask and seek and knock for it.

When it is enjoyed, it fills and floods the heart. It is pressed upon us in the precept, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." Only a child of God can say from the