

## "SPIRIT OF BURNING, COME!"

"When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning." Isaiah 4:4.

"The Spirit of burning!" It is a glowing and powerful phrase, isn't it? It may be thought of as one of the many titles which the Bible gives to the Holy Spirit. He is called "the Spirit of God," "the Spirit of the Lord," "the Spirit of truth," "the Spirit of holiness," "the Spirit of life," and here in our text, "the Spirit of burning."

It was of this that Charles Wesley must have been thinking when he gave us the prayer-hymn, which is entitled, "Jesus, Thine All-Victorious Love." In the second and third stanzas the fervent cry of the Christian arises:

"O that in me the sacred fire  
Might now begin to glow;  
Burn up the dross of base desire,  
And make the mountains flow.

"O that it now from heaven might fall,  
And all my sins consume!  
Come, Holy Ghost, for Thee I call,  
Spirit of burning, come!"

What does Pentecost mean? Well, this among other things: that the early Christians who were faltering, feeble and fearful passed so completely under the control of the Holy Spirit that their faltering was turned into firmness, their feebleness into force, and their fearfulness into flaming faith. Listen to this: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance," (Acts 2:1-4).

Our text tells us that there are some sins that washing alone will not cleanse and purging alone will not remove. There is nothing to be done for them except that they should be burned out of people. The Spirit of judgment will pronounce such and such an act, such and such a habit, such and such a motive, to be sin. The Spirit of judgment having sentenced it, the Spirit of burning will come and, with its flames, lick up all that is around and utterly consume or destroy it.

Too many Christians do not have any such sign of fire upon them today. In no real sense can we be said to be on fire for God. By no effort of the imagination would anyone say of us that we were burning with any passion for righteousness. We are not kindled or kindling personalities. That is why we need to pray: "Spirit of burning, come!"

What will it mean for such a prayer to be answered?

### I. He Will Burn Out The Litter.

The Holy Spirit will burn out the litter of all that is unworthy in the Christian's heart. In the first chapter of this prophecy, Isaiah recorded the fact that he heard God say to His covenant people: "I will purely purge away thy dross" (Isaiah 1:25).

In the sixth chapter the prophet wrote an account of his own experience of passing through the fire of God's cleansing. The vision of the Lord in His holiness smote him and he cried: "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips." That confession was the prelude to the cleansing. His lips were touched with "a live coal" from the altar of God, and the assurance was given him: "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged" (Isaiah 6:7).

Most of us are too proud and too self-satisfied to admit it, but the truth is that the majority of us who are God's children have a lot of litter on the premises of our hearts that needs to be thrown into the fire of God's consuming Spirit.

The hearts of some of us are littered with values that are unworthy of followers of Christ. We are far more regular with trashy literature than we are with the Bible or some other enriching book. Cheap values---that is what we have on our hands. We had better feed them to the purging flame of God's Spirit. There are higher values on which dedicated Christians should set their souls.

The average person finds it easy to be satisfied with low standards of Christian living. God purposes for us and holds out before us tremendous things; He has high and mighty privileges for us, and, yet, some of us are content with the dross of unworthy standards. Our standard of life and service is so very different from what God would have it be. The dross of unworthy standards needs to be burned out of us.

The unsightly litter of our low motives needs to be burned out as dross also. All of us act, but few of us raise the question of why we act as we do. Except those actions that are, in the most elementary way, instinctive, our ways of acting should be challenged by the simple question, Why? That puts you in the realm of motive. Although a good motive cannot sanctify a bad action, a bad motive will always vitiate a good action. Prayer, for instance, is a good action. Yet, Christ made it plain that if our praying is done to be seen of men so they will remark about how pious we are, the whole affair is poisoned. It is bad.

You teach a Sunday School class. Why? Is the desire to serve Christ the supreme motive for doing so? You sing in the choir. Why? Somebody says, "It's a way of expressing yourself." Nonsense! If you are devoted to Christ, it isn't expressing yourself that concerns you; it's expressing Him. You go to church. Why? Duty? That's one motive, and it's better than some others. Custom? That's one motive. Makes a good appearance---even from a business standpoint? That's one motive. But, mind you, a Christian whose motives have been cleansed goes to church chiefly to meet God in the ministry of His Word and the fellowship of His people. There are many unworthy motives that ought to be consigned to the fire and burned up.

Take the unholy habits and attitudes that litter and make ugly the inner landscape of many Christians. All meanness, all selfishness, all impurity, all suspicion, all jealousy all criticism, all envy and all hatred will disappear from our hearts if we will just throw them into the crucible of Christ's loving soul.

## II. He Will Burn In The Likeness.

The Holy Spirit not only burns out the litter of our lives, but He also burns in the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wrote an important word for us on this matter, and it is full of beauty. "But we all, (meaning all of us who are Christians) with open face beholding as in a glass (meaning the mirror of the Word) the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (II Corinthians 3:18).

To be sure, Christ is our pattern. But we are only fooling ourselves, and pathetically so, if we think that we can turn on a little more will-power here or strain out an extra effort there and, thus, imitate the Lord Jesus Christ. There is too much of that kind of thing that passes for Christianity. It misses entirely the point which the New Testament stresses again and again. Instead of thinking we can imitate Him, we must let the Holy Spirit dwell in us and reproduce His likeness in us.

Instead of thinking of the Holy Spirit only as an occupant of a dwelling, think of Him as a fire by which the artist's design is burned into a piece of pottery. The Holy Spirit burns in more love, which is Christlike, more peace, more joy, more longsuffering, more gentleness, more meekness, more faith and more self-discipline. Clearer and clearer the image of Christ comes through. It appears in every phase and feature of our living. Others see it too.

Late one night in New York City, some theological students were returning to their quarters when they came upon a man so drunk he had fallen into the gutter. Most of the young men did not have a second thought for the fellow, but one of them, who had done work for Christ in a city mission, stooped down and helped him up. He said, "Tell me where you live, and I'll call a taxi and take you home." The kindness of his voice moved the intoxicated man and he mumbled, "If Jesus Christ ever lived on earth, He must have been like you."

Actually that is the sort of tribute that ought to be paid constantly to the friends and followers of the Saviour. If we are not prompting people to speak like that, perhaps it is because the Holy Spirit has not burned in us the likeness of Christ.

### III. He Will Burn Up The Life.

When the Spirit of burning comes into our hearts and lives, there will not only be a burning out of the litter from our lives and a burning in of the likeness of our Lord, but also a burning up of the life on the altar of dedication. In Hebrews 9:14 we are told that Christ "through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God." While the supreme climax of that offering was at the cross, His whole life was a sacrificial gift, the continuous burning up of dedicated energies, to the glory of God the Father. In the epitaph on the tombstone of Adam Clarke, the famous commentator of London, are these words: "In giving light to others I am burned away." That is always the price of our best living.

Under usual conditions fire means three things: ignition, combustion and illumination. Without ignition there will not be any fire at all. Also, without combustion there will not be any illumination. The combustion is the burning up of fuel and the giving forth of released energy and light.

Show me the people in any field of endeavor who are on fire and going places. Invariably they are people who do not greatly spare themselves. Their precious life-energies are the fuel on which the fire of their purpose feeds. It is not different in the realm of Christian living and creative spiritual service. Your life must be given unsparingly if the Holy Spirit is to make you a healing and guiding light in the kingdom of God.

What Christ asks is total commitment. Only then can the Holy Spirit make you a flaming Christian. In a prayer of dedication John Tauler prayed: "Dear Lord and Bridegroom, I here vow and promise to Thee that all that Thou willest I also will. Come sickness, come health, come pleasure or pain, sweet or bitter, cold or hot, whatever Thou willest that do I also will. I desire altogether to come out from my own will, and to yield a whole and willing obedience to Thee." The Holy Spirit takes such self-giving as that and converts it into red-hot discipleship.

Combustion! Then what? Illumination! The giving is followed by the glowing. You see it perfectly in John the Baptist, of whom it was said: "He was a burning and a shining light." Had there not been any burning, there would not have been any shining.

What Christians need today is the touch of fire. We have truth without thrill, ritual without radiance, organization without ardor, orthodoxy without rapture, morality without emotion and piety without passion.

A Communist captain was leading an attack on a certain Chinese city. His artillery was laying down a barrage, softening up the people of the city before the infantry attacked. At the same time he was holding briefly a missionary, whose name was Richard Hillis. Looking down at the town, the Communist officer said sneeringly to Hillis: "I would lay down my life if the doctrine of Karl Marx and Lenin could be taught in those streets. But you Christians will scarcely go across the street to tell anyone of Jesus Christ."

It is a tragic hour when Christians have lost the real fire of the Holy Spirit and Communists have borrowed the false fire of Satan. Isn't it time to reverse this?