



BUT when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: 9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. 10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: 12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Matt 3:7-12)

The title of this devotion is more often associated with the charismatic movement than with a traditional Church of the Reformation model as we are in the AOC. Rest assured, my comments are in no way related to the wild and error-laden side of evangelism whose head is turned by pomp, but to the sound doctrines of Christ. If I err, it will be in understanding the meaning of Scripture and by no means a disregard for the Word in favor of wild fantasies. But I trust the Holy Ghost will make my heart and mind keen to the understanding of the subject at hand. It will be well to emulate the Bereans: *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.* (Acts 17:11) If I err in reading, tell me for my own edification.

Have you wondered what John the Baptist meant when he uttered the words of our leading text? *I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.* In the context of this verse, the Holy Ghost and FIRE are synonymous. Do you remember the counsel Christ gave to Nicodemus on that first night of meeting? *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.* (John 3:5-6) John did baptize with water unto repentance, but the baptism of Christ is both water and Spirit (fire). Fire is used to illustrate the Holy Ghost in other places as well. When the disciples were gathered together at Pentecost in Acts 2, the Holy Ghost descended on the heads of each as “*tongues of fire.*”

To our dear Sister at Jacob's Well, Jesus said, ²³ *But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.* ²⁴ *God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.* (John 4:23-24) There are churches today that are very strict on biblical truth. They use Scripture in all their deliberations, and apply the same with exact certitude. There are other churches (many of the charismatic variety, and others) from whose sermons drops of honey seem to fall. They observe no discipline in the church to curb sinful behavior, but hide beneath the mask of misguided love to the detriment of God's Holy Word. They refuse to judge sin even in the face of our Lord's commandment to judge with righteous judgement. *Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.* (John 7:24) What did Christ mean? He meant that in judging a person to be a sinner, we do not use our affections, or our political sense, but the Word of the Lord in judging. In that way, the verdict is not ours, but the Lord's. If I say an abortionist is a murderer, it is not my judgment, but the Lord's. (*Thou shalt do no murder*) The same with homosexuality and lust. Instead of a church whose aim is strictly legalistic, or the on other hand, so tolerant of sin to allow anything, we should strive to be a church that worships both in Spirit (love) and in Truth (God's Word).

When true repentance accompanies baptism for the chosen in Christ, the Holy Ghost is granted as well. All the Elect in Christ receive the Holy Ghost at the moment of their belief. As Peter said to the Judaeans who believed, *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. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.* (Acts 2:38-39)

Because you are such faithful readers of my devotions, I am sure you will remember when I wrote about an entire nation being baptized at once with water and the Spirit (FIRE). Oh, you do not remember? Hmmm, well, I will remind you once more since your soul's heart cannot lay hold to the test at once. Have you known the *salvation of the Lord*? In terror, the Children of Israel cried out to God when Pharaoh's army pursued and closed on them on the banks of the Red Sea. Moses commanded them to *Fear not, stand still, and behold the salvation of the Lord.* (Exodus 14:13) Hidden just beneath the surface of the mystery of salvation is that we can do nothing to save ourselves. It is altogether a work of grace of the Lord. Note how the Lord both led the children of Israel across the dry ground of the Red Sea, and also followed as a rear-guard for their passage: *And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: ²⁰ And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night.* (Ex 14:19-20) That Great Pillar of God's Spirit both led and protected them. It was a Pillar of Fire by Night and a Pillar of Cloud by Day – but in both cases that FIRE and that CLOUD represented the Holy Spirit of God. Amazing that the Spirit gave light to the people of God, but that light was darkness to the pursuing enemies of God's people.

What happened when the enemy of God's people pursued? *And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians. And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the*

Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them. (Ex 14:23-28)

So, in crossing the Red Sea, Israel was baptized by water beneath the sea, and by the Spirit (Cloud) which followed. The gift of the Holy Ghost always follows hard on true baptism. It is not a second act of God some period of time after baptism, but given at the same time. ¹ *Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; ² And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; ³ And did all eat the same spiritual meat; ⁴ And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. ⁵ But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. (1 Cor 10:1-5)*

We, too, as God's Elect People, are baptized with that same baptism of water and Spirit (Fire). Though we may be sprinkled, or immersed, we went under the water of baptism; and we came to Christ with the benefit of the Holy Ghost both preceding and following. The purifying fire of the Holy Ghost burns away the chaff, and brings the dross to the surface for casting aside. It gives echo to the Psalmist petition: *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (Psalm 51:7)* Hyssop is the purgative that cleanses us within as the Fire of the Holy Spirit brings the dross to the surface in the Refiner's Fire. And the water cleanses away the chaff from our outward behavior to reflect the purity of the inward man made whole in Christ.

The Holy Ghost bears the exact same nature of God, for He is God in the third Person. His anointing will never cause us to stand in public places speaking unintelligible rubbish that neither man, beast, or even we ourselves understand. *For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. (1 Cor 14:33)* But what of those who mimic the sin of Babel in speaking as babbling fools before the people of God? *They shall be ashamed, and also confounded, all of them: they shall go to confusion together that are makers of idols. (Isaiah 45:16)* If I see a man from some remote Pacific Island travel to the United States, not speaking a word of English, and stand in the congregation giving Godly testimony in the King's language, I will know that God has worked a miracle. But how can I believe a miracle that any lost soul can mimic in standing up and letting off with a line of incomprehensible babbling? Even if it were possible and genuine, it cannot be regarded as miraculous since any man, or animal, can do the same.

I pray that my polemic against man-centered worship has not caused deep hurt to any who may be deceived by the great delusions of modern worship; but it is OK to be offended since God's Word is offensive to those who do not believe.

My heart aches to see strong, biblical churches bend to the whims of the world in bringing in charismatic speakers to preach to their youth – and also to bring in the loud and frivolous music of the world as a substitute for the great hymns that teach doctrine and reinforce its memory on the minds of the youth. They believe that the youth will be drawn in if they make all the world has to offer available in the church; but what is left of Christ for them since righteous living and mammon cannot exist together? From time to time, we find it necessary to reassess our support of such churches, for the youth are our spiritual commodity that we bear to Christ.

Holy Fire, Yes.

False fire, NO!