

## Is It a Hard Saying?

By C.G. Finney

In a former article I said that the lack of an enduement of power from on high should be deemed a disqualification for a pastor, a deacon or elder, a Sunday School superintendent, a professor in a Christian college, and especially for a professor in a theological seminary. Is this a hard saying? Is this an uncharitable saying? Is it unjust? Is it unreasonable? Is it unscriptural? Suppose any one of the apostles, or those present on the day of Pentecost, had failed through apathy, selfishness, unbelief, indolence, or ignorance to obtain this enduement of power, would it have been uncharitable, unjust, unreasonable, or unscriptural, to have accounted him disqualified for the work which Christ had appointed them?

Christ had expressly informed them that without this enduement they could do nothing. He had expressly enjoined it upon them not to attempt it in their own strength, but to tarry at Jerusalem until they received the necessary power from on high. He had also expressly promised that if they tarried, in the sense which He intended, they should receive it "not many days hence." They evidently understood Him to enjoin upon them to tarry in the sense of a constant waiting upon Him in prayer and supplication for the blessing. Now, suppose that any one of them had stayed away and attended to his own business, and waited for the sovereignty of God to confer this power. He of course would have been disqualified for the work; and if his fellow-Christians, who had obtained this power, had deemed him so, would it have been uncharitable, unreasonable, and unscriptural?

And is it not true of all to whom the command to disciple the world is given, and to whom the promise of this power is made, if through any shortcoming or fault of-theirs they fail to obtain this gift that they are in fact disqualified for the work, and especially for any official station? Are they not, in fact, disqualified for leadership in the sacramental host? Are they qualified as teachers of those who are to do the work? If it is a fact that they do lack this power, however this defect is to be accounted for, it is also a fact that they are not qualified to be teachers of God's people; and if they are seen to be disqualified because they lack this power, it must be reasonable and right and scriptural so to deem them, and so to speak of them, and so to treat them. Who has a right to complain? Surely they have not. Shall the Church of God be burdened with teachers and leaders who lack this fundamental qualification, when their failing to possess it must be their own fault? The manifest apathy, indolence, ignorance, and unbelief that exists upon this subject is truly amazing. They are inexcusable. They must be highly criminal. With such a command to convert the world ringing in our ears; with such an injunction to wait in constant, wrestling prayer until we receive the power; with such a promise, made by such a Savior, held out to us of all the help we need from Christ Himself, what excuse can we offer for being powerless in this great work? What an awful responsibility rests upon us, upon the whole

Church, upon every Christian!

One might ask, How is apathy, how is indolence, how is the common fatal neglect possible under such circumstances? If any of the primitive Christians to whom this commandment was given had failed to receive this power, should we not think them greatly to blame? If such default had been sin in them, how much more in us with all the light of history and of fact blazing upon us, which they had not received? Some ministers and many Christians treat this matter as if it were to be left to the sovereignty of God, without any persistent effort to obtain this endowment. Did the primitive Christians so understand and treat it? No, indeed. They gave themselves no rest until this baptism of power came upon them.

I once heard a minister preaching upon the subject of the baptism of the Holy Ghost. He treated it as a reality; and when he came to the question of how it was to be obtained, he said truly that it was to be obtained as the apostles obtained it on the day of Pentecost. I was much gratified, and listened eagerly to hear him press the obligation on his hearers to give themselves no rest until they had obtained it. But in this I was disappointed: for before he sat down he seemed to relieve the audience from the feeling of obligation to obtain the baptism and left the impression that the matter was to be left to the discretion of God, and said what appeared to imply a censure of those that vehemently and persistently urged upon God the fulfillment of the promise. Neither did he hold out to them the certainty of their obtaining the blessing if they fulfilled the conditions. The sermon was in most respects a good one; but I think the audience left without any feeling of encouragement or sense of obligation to seek earnestly the baptism. This is a common fault of the sermons that I hear. There is much that is instructive in them; but they fail to leave either a sense of obligation or a feeling of great encouragement, as to the use of means, upon the congregation. They are greatly defective in their winding up. They neither leave the conscience under a pressure nor the whole mind under the stimulus of hope. The doctrine is often good, but the "what then?" is often left out.

Many ministers and professors of religion seem to be theorizing, criticizing, and endeavoring to justify their neglect of this attainment. So did not the apostles and other Christians. It was not a question which they endeavored to grasp with their intellects before they embraced it with their hearts. It was with them, as it should be with us, a question of *faith in a promise*. I find many persons endeavoring to grasp with their intellect and settle as a theory questions of pure experience. They are puzzling themselves with endeavors to apprehend with the intellect that which is to be received as a conscious experience through faith.

There is need of a great reformation in the Church on this particular point. The churches should wake up to the facts in the case and take a new position, a firm stand in regard to the qualifications of ministers and church officers. They should refuse to settle on a man as pastor of whose qualifications for the office in this respect they are not well satisfied. Whatever else he may have to recommend him, if his record does not show that he has this endowment of power to win souls to Christ, they should deem him unqualified. It used to be the custom of churches, and I believe in some places is so still. In presenting a call to the pastorate, to certify that having witnessed the spiritual fruits of his labors they deem him qualified and called of God to the work of the ministry. Churches should be well satisfied in some way that they call a fruitful minister and not a dry stalk—that is, a mere intellect, a mere head with little heart; an

elegant writer, but with no unction; a great logician, but of little faith; a fervid imagination, it may be, but with no Holy Ghost power.

The churches should hold the theological seminaries to a strict account in this matter; and until they do, I fear the theological seminaries will never wake up to their responsibility. Some years ago, one branch of the Scottish Church was so disturbed with the lack of unction and power in the ministers furnished them by their theological seminary that they passed a resolution that until the seminary reformed in this respect they would not employ ministers that were educated there. This was a necessary, a just, a timely rebuke, which I believe had a very salutary effect. A theological seminary ought by all means to be a school not merely for the teaching of doctrine, but also, and even more especially, for the development of Christian experience. To be sure, the intellect should be well furnished in those schools; but it is immeasurably more important that the pupils should be led to a thorough personal knowledge of Christ, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, and to be made conformable to His death. A theological seminary that aims mainly at the culture of the intellect, and sends out learned men who lack this endowment of power from on high, is a snare and a stumbling block to the Church. The seminaries should recommend no one to the churches, however great his intellectual attainments, unless he has this most essential of all attainments, the endowment of power from on high. The seminaries should be held as incompetent to educate men for the ministry if it is seen that they send out men as ministers who have not this most essential qualification. The churches should inform themselves, and look to those seminaries which furnish not merely the best educated but the most unctuous and spiritually powerful ministers.

It is amazing that while it is generally admitted that the endowment of power from on high is a reality, and essential to ministerial success, practically it should be treated by the churches and by the schools as of comparatively little importance. In theory it is admitted to be everything, but in practice treated as if it were nothing. From the apostles to the present day it has been seen that men of very little human culture, but endued with this power, have been highly successful in winning souls to Christ; while men of the greatest learning, with all that the schools have done for them, have been powerless so far as the proper work of the ministry is concerned. And yet we go on laying ten times more stress on human culture than we do on the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Practically, human culture is treated as infinitely more important than the endowment of power high.

Most seminaries are furnished with learned men, but often not with men of spiritual power; hence, they do not insist upon this endowment of power as indispensable to the work of the ministry. Students are pressed almost beyond endurance with study and the culture of the intellect while scarcely an hour in a day is given to instruction in Christian experience. Indeed, I do not know that so much as one course of lectures on Christian experience is given in the theological seminaries. But religion is an experience. It is a consciousness. Personal fellowship with God is the secret of the whole of it. There is a world of most essential learning in this direction wholly neglected by the theological seminaries. With them doctrine, philosophy, theology, Church history, sermonizing are everything, and real heartunion with God nothing. Spiritual power to prevail with God and to prevail with man has but little place in their teaching.

I have often been surprised at the judgment men form in regard to the prospective usefulness of young men preparing for the ministry. Even professors are very apt, I see, to deceive themselves on this subject. If a young man is a good scholar, a fine writer, makes good progress in exegesis and stands high in intellectual culture, they have strong hopes for him, even though they must know in many such cases that these young men cannot pray—that they have no unction, no power in prayer, no spirit of wrestling, of agonizing and prevailing with God. Yet they are expecting them, because of their culture, to make their mark in the ministry, to be highly useful. For my part, I expect no such thing of this class of men. I have infinitely more hope for the usefulness of a man who, at any cost, will keep up daily fellowship with God; who is yearning for and struggling, after the highest possible spiritual attainment; who will not live without daily prevalence in prayer and being clothed with power from on high. Churches, presbyteries, associations, and whoever license young men for the ministry are often very faulty in this respect. They will spend hours in informing themselves of the intellectual culture of the candidates, but scarcely as many minutes in ascertaining their heart culture—what they know of the power of Christ to save from sin, what they know of the power of prayer, and whether and to what extent they are endued with power from on high to win souls to Christ. The whole proceeding on such occasions cannot but leave the impression that human learning is preferred to spiritual unction. Oh that it were different, and that we were all agreed, practically, now and forever, to hold fast to the promise of Christ, and never think ourselves or anybody else to be fit for the great work of the Church until we have received a rich endowment of power from on high.

I beg of my brethren, and especially my younger brethren, not to conceive of these articles as written in the spirit of reproach. I beg the churches, I beg the seminaries, to receive a word of exhortation from an old man, who has had some experience in these things, and one whose heart mourns and is weighed down in view of the shortcomings of the Church, the ministers, and the seminaries on this subject. Brethren, I beseech you to more thoroughly consider this matter, to wake up and lay it to heart, and rest not until this subject of the endowment of power from on high is brought forward into its proper place and takes that prominent and practical position in the view of the whole Church that Christ intended it should.

-- C.G. Finney