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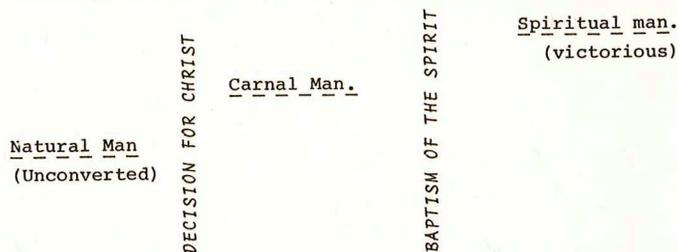
BLESSING

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THE SECOND BLESSING

No doubt you have heard of the "second blessing", which is also wrongly called the "Baptism of the Spirit." This is a spiritual event which is said to occur at some stage after one's 'decision for Christ' and which leads to a high level of Christian experience, including the exercise of spiritual gifts. Decision for Christ, it is argued, makes a person a Christian, but until the 'fulness of the Spirit' occurs that Christian life will be 'carnal'. The reason so many Christians are unvictorious, joyless, unfruitful, unable to perform healings or speak in tongues is that although they have 'decided' for Christ they are not "filled with the Spirit."

The Christian life, according to the second blessing teaching, can be set out in the following stages.



According to this diagram mankind can be divided into three types of person.

- Natural man (sinful and unbelieving)
- Carnal man (forgiven and "unfruitful").
- Spiritual man (Victorious; gifted; joyful; triumphant).

This teaching appears to be convincing because some Christians have enjoyed an experience after Deciding for Christ which has transformed their lives. John Wesley is said to have had such an experience and the disciples themselves, by the Pentecost effusion, are claimed to be the proto-types for all believers. The disciples it is said, were believers, yet without real power until the Baptism of the Spirit at Pentecost.

TWO TESTS

The validity of the "second blessing" teaching may be tested at two points:

1. Does Jesus command it or do the Epistles require it? The fact is, they do not! No teaching which is to be normative for the Christian life can claim our attention if it is not found among the commands of Jesus and the Apostolic Epistles.
2. Does it correspond with Paul's view of the Christian experience? The apostle makes it quite clear that the test of the Spirit's presence is whether a person can say "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor. 12: 3). The test is NOT am I joyful, do I speak in tongues, am I victorious, etc. but "is Jesus my Lord?"

Paul states that the Spirit who enables us to make this confession also

- \* Incorporates us into the fellowship of a Christian congregation (12: 13),... and
- \* Endows each of us with various and differing gifts (12: 7-11).

Notice that 1 Corinthians 12 is a comprehensive description of the work of the Spirit in Converting, Incorporating, and Endowing. It is significant that the Spirit's gifts are exercised in the body without the alleged 'second blessing'.

Why then is there not more evidence of the gifts of the Spirit today? Two points may be given in answer:

- (i) Modern Christians give no real place to serious Christian fellowship. The modern church meeting is so UNLIKE the New Testament quality of fellowship that little opportunity exists for the gifts to be seen. Where the opportunity exists the gifts are exercised.
- (ii) The Spirit distributes the gifts as he wills (12: 11). He will give or withhold His graces and gifts according to His own purposes. Paul is clear: not all are apostles and not all speak in tongues (12: 28-30). Nor are all the gifts to be found in one church.

IT IS GOD WHO BLESSES .... Those who advocate the "second blessing" are often sincere and zealous Christians, who have themselves experienced a dramatic spiritual upsurge in their own lives. God is undoubtedly the author of all great Spiritual experiences but the person who has been blessed in this way must ensure that he places a correct interpretation on what God has done in him. If the New Testament does not call on believers to be "blessed again" as a great "second" experience, a person who does happen to have had a dramatic spiritual upsurge after his decision for Christ ought not to create a second blessing theology out of his experience. He must simply thank God for this blessing (and there will be more to come) and point all men to God as the source of all Spiritual blessing and power.

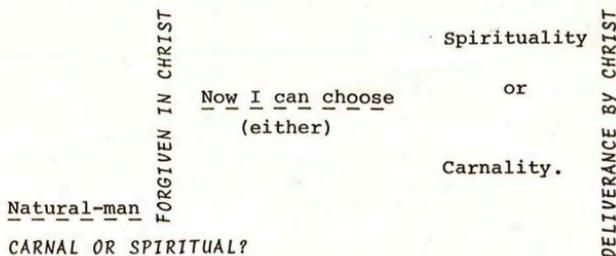
The person who has been "blessed again" will tend to create a formula for others to follow, based on his own experience pattern. Yet the author of all blessings is God, not a formula or a slogan. There are in fact no Spiritual "shock treatments", no sure fire "wonder drugs", no instant cure-alls which are able to lift our performance easily or permanently to a radiant level. There is a way - but it is the way of discipline, sacrifice and daily diligence in the things of the Spirit.

CARNAL and SPIRITUAL

The Epistles do not encourage us to believe that Carnal Christians become Spiritual Christians by some great post-conversion experience. Rather we are taught that when a person becomes a Christian he immediately has both principles at work in his life - carnality and spirituality. The Spirit draws him "up"; the flesh pulls him "down". The believer is encouraged to choose the way of the Spirit, since it is He who has led him to trust and obey Jesus. (Romans 8: 5-15).

This is the way of the conflict. It means putting to death the things of the flesh and living according to the Spirit. This is a conflict which will continue from our incorporation "in Christ" to the final deliverance when Christ comes. The New Testament promises no interim victory. The believer will progress in spirituality, but there is no actual victory until Christ finally delivers him from sin and death (Romans 7: 24-25; 8: 23-25; 1 Corinthians 15: 49-51).

In the meantime, in the midst of the conflict, the believer is to enjoy the victory of forgiveness through Calvary, and choose to live spiritually day by day, patiently awaiting his final deliverance, as in the diagram.



The choice is yours, as a natural man you had no choice. Because the Spirit was absent, you were committed to the way of the flesh. But now you have the Spirit you are free to choose the way of Spirituality. Paul accuses the Corinthians of Carnality. Their carnality did not consist in a lack of gifts, for they possessed every spiritual gift in abundance. (1 Cor. 1: 5). What were the marks of their carnality?

1. Jealousy and strife in their fellowship (1 Cor. 3: 3)
2. Arrogance towards the Apostle (4: 4-21).
3. Toleration of gross immorality in the Church (5: 1-8).
4. A litigious spirit (6: 1-7).
5. Compromise with sexual immorality (6: 9-20).
6. Insensitivity to the weak consciences of the new convert (8: 1-13).
7. Compromise with idolatry (10: 14-22).
8. Self-assertive displays of gifts (14).
9. Unbelief in their final deliverance (15: 12f).

In other words, to be carnal was not to lack gifts, but to be jealous, arrogant, sensual, insensitive to others and unbelieving.

But if the Spirit has led us to Christ, and if we have died in Him to Sin's judgment and been raised in Him to a living awareness of God as Father, HOW CAN we continue in Sin?

Deliberate carnality is unthinkable (Romans 6: 2).

The key passages on Spirituality include Romans 8: 12-14, Galatians 5, Ephesians 4-5, and Colossians 3-4. Some leading thoughts from these passages are:

1. Rejoice in your forgiveness in Christ and yearn for final deliverance at His Coming.
2. Recognise that you now believe in Jesus because the Spirit led you to Him and therefore that the Spirit now indwells you.
3. Seek the daily fulness (= leadership) of the Spirit in your life.
4. Give no place to the patterns of the old life.
5. In particular, study the scriptures and recognise carnality for what it is and what Spiritual behaviour consists of. (See Ephesians 4: 17 - 6: 10 and Colossians 3: 1 - 4: 6.)

Why not set time aside each day to commit yourself to the Spiritual alternative?

But don't set your hope on some sudden and future "cure all" injection. The only thing the New Testament calls us to hope for is the final deliverance in Jesus' return.