

EARLY OVERCOMER EMPHASIS

An outline of the early ministry of the Overcomer magazine may help to give some explanation of the things we have covered on preceding pages.

Mrs. Penn-Lewis was converted in 1883, and her early growth occurred under the fine ministry of Keswick's Evan Hopkins. She received sound and clear teaching concerning the believer's identification with the Lord Jesus in His death and resurrection (Romans Six, etc.). Being of an aggressive nature, she was soon involved in teaching a number of large Bible classes, mainly amongst YMCA girls.

Due to needs encountered along the way in her life and service, Mrs. Penn-Lewis began to seek power, continually insisting that God give it to her until she worked herself into an experience of the so-called baptism of the Spirit. This seemed to produce all sorts of wonderful results, for a time. It is significant to note that she made similar claims at the time of her initial consecration—only to have the Lord reveal to her years later that it had been nothing more than “consecrated flesh.” And it was during this period, some nine years after her conversion, that she came into contact with a Miss Soltau; one who steered her into definite “holiness” areas—for which she was quite well prepared.

By the time the Revival in Wales occurred in the fall of 1904, Mrs. Penn-Lewis had for several years been conducting “deeper life” conferences in both England and Wales. She was in close touch with the Revival, and later claimed to have had much to do with its inception through her conference ministry. At any rate, the Revival in Wales was holiness throughout. Doubtless there were those who were saved and helped in the midst of it all, but the incident did infinitely more far-reaching and lasting harm, than good. Mrs. Penn-Lewis admitted that wildfire broke out “from the very outset.” This included tongues—a fact that she failed to mention in her reports and writings concerning the Revival. The physical, mental, and spiritual wreckage resulting from this Revival was appalling—including the leaders and workers, to say nothing of the new converts. As to the leaders and workers, she said that “thousands,” and, “nearly all,” were “wrecked.”

Young Evan Roberts, miner—Bible school student, was the acknowledged leader of the Revival. His message was the Baptism of the Holy Spirit; and he insisted that all experience it in order to have any real part in the Revival. Ere long Roberts experienced a complete breakdown, incapacitating him for years. He was never again able to carry on public work, nor did he ever have anything more to do with revival ministry. The Revival collapsed in the spring of 1905.

As a magazine, *The Overcomer* was first published in 1910. Although still closely confined, with health only partially restored, Roberts, with Mrs. Penn-Lewis, was able to co-edit the magazine. Both editors were convinced that the Welsh Revival was broken up through demon influence, and he attributed his breakdown to the same cause. The one reason for the publication of the *Overcomer* was the hope of salvaging some of the spiritual wreckage amongst believers, caused by the Revival. (The actual cause being the so-called Baptism of the Spirit.)

1910 - During its first year the message of the *Overcomer* was “the Cross in the life of the believer.” But there was an additional emphasis: “The Cross broke the power of sin and Satan in the life of the believer.”

This was not error in itself—but all error is truth pushed or twisted out of **balance**. Due to this added slant and thrust of the editors, **plus** the spiritual condition of the readers resulting from the Welsh Revival, concentration was mainly upon aggressive warfare against Satan without the necessary years for becoming established in the basic truth of identification: freedom from the dominion of sin and self. Another reason for this erroneous emphasis taking hold is the sad fact that once an individual is entangled in holiness revivalism it is almost impossible for him to settle down and wait to become firmly established in the seemingly mundane truths for healthy growth and spiritual stability. Once involved, few ever escape the devastation of “holiness.”

There is a relentless progression in this realm of error: the different phases and degrees of “the Baptism of the Spirit”; the enduement of power for service and aggressive warfare; often the tongues; the healing; and then the vast and hazy labyrinth of demonism, where, if not before, the many breakdowns occur.

1911 - This year the Overcomer teaching continued in the realm of identification; with the main emphasis on the experiential pathway of the believer in death as the means of life in the heavenlies—chiefly to do battle with the enemy and his hosts of darkness.

1912 - All during this year the message pressed heavily upon the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Neither of these leaders really saw Pentecost in relation to I Cor. 12:13—their eyes were upon Peter’s new power. Their teaching was that the Holy Spirit must be “received as a Person,” **after** conversion. Then, later still, if and when certain “conditions” were fulfilled, there would be the Pentecostal baptism of the Holy Spirit for power in service, and aggressive warfare.

The “conditions” laid upon the seeker of this Baptism were, incidentally: 1) “The putting away of every known sin in the life; 2) definite trust in the power of the Blood of Christ to cleanse the heart from the love of sin; 3) obedience right up to the edge of light through the Word of God; 4) full surrender to God as His entirely, with not one thing clung to and withheld from Him; 5) the act of faith in which the believer, fulfilling these conditions, takes the gift of the Holy Spirit, as simply as he received the gift of eternal life through Christ.”

In the fall of this same year the editors published their controversial book, **War On the Saints**. Its purpose was identical to that of the magazine—seeking to rescue the many drawn into the vortex of “demonism,” and “the Baptism.”

1913 - This was the year that “Warfare” was pressed—**aggressive** warfare against Satan and his hosts of darkness. As always, this developed into their seeing nearly everything the least bit out of line as demon influence. Everyone who was not already a casualty, was fully taken up with fighting the foe in hand-to-hand battle—this defeated foe!

There is no question but that the believer who is “strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might,” is called upon to “put on the whole armour of God, that ye might be able to stand stand therefore” (Eph. 6). To “stand” in the Victorious Lord Jesus is to see His completed victory carried out upon

the Calvary-defeated Enemy. But most of these zealots cast all aside in order to do battle.

Saddest of all, what these people considered to be demon influence, etc., was simply neurotic, and Revival-induced emotionalism; resulting in out-of-control nervous systems, often with the sub-conscious taking control. (See following chapters on Tongues, and Healing)

1914 - The Overcomer message for this year was **Translation!** The two editors were somehow convinced that the crippled condition of their followers, and the Church at large, was due to a flood of demons released through the revival in Wales, as well as similar incidents in the U.S., India, Korea, and China. What with the added onslaught of the enemy upon the world in general by means of World War I, this must certainly be the End.

Hence their exhortations were to stand firm in all the teaching given thus far; make sure of one's baptism in the Spirit; renew one's consecration; battle the enemy harder than ever; avoid being too involved in service; and don't look ahead, but look up. In order for these leaders to back up what their teaching had led to, there was nothing to do but put a halt to further operations. They could go no further! So the final issue of The Over-comer was announced at the end of 1914.

1917 - Now Mrs. Penn-Lewis was to take up the publication of the magazine once again, this time without the assistance of Evan Roberts. Questions from many as to why their Translation had not come about in '14 were weakly fended off; and the main effort of The Overcomer was an attempt to promote revival once again, both in needy England, and devastated Wales. With a somewhat modified message, the magazine continues up to the present time.

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We trust that the material shared thus far makes it quite clear that the so-called Baptism of the Spirit was the basic cause of all this pathetic teaching of error and resultant spiritual ruin; with thousands of believers being dragged down to an experience-centered level and on to the darkness and depression of what they were led to believe was demonism.

The only safe and Scriptural ground for the believer is to see that the **baptizing** work of the Holy Spirit is His once-for-all ministration at the moment of one's new birth, whereas the **filling** with the Spirit is a continuous process of growth. The one spiritual baptism places the believer "in Christ" (Rom. 6:3, 4; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12), and into His Body (I Cor. 12:13). The filling with the Spirit, conversely, is repeatable; and is, in fact, a **continuous process** (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17 and 13:9).

Once the believer understands that the Holy Spirit (according to the Greek, He is never referred to as the Holy Ghost) eternally dwells within from the moment of the new birth, he is free to look to Him for His **filling** (control). And, contrary to most of the present-day teaching, the Holy Spirit progressively fills (up to one's capacity at the time) the believer on the basis of development and growth, not by an arbitrary set of conditions.

By faith in the Scriptural facts, one appropriates His filling as part of the overall process of growth, rather than an at-the-moment experience of "blessing." The Holy Spirit fills and controls the believer to the extent that the old nature is dealt with by means of the finished work of the Cross (Rom. 6:1-11). Self held in the place of death, progressively, by the Spirit; Christ raised to the place of Life, progressively, by the same Spirit: **growth**. "Not I, but Christ."

The believer is not filled with the Holy Spirit by fulfilling "conditions." It is true that any necessary conditions for His filling will be in effect when the believer is filled, but it will not be because he or she met those conditions in order to be filled. It is because of spiritual growth, which brings about those conditions as the normal part of a healthy walk in the Spirit; thereby giving the Holy Spirit the necessary ground to go on producing His fruit in the life and to carry out His service through that life. (Better stop and go over that again!)

One of the most common "conditions" insisted upon by most leaders for the filling of the Spirit, is **full surrender**. Samuel Ridout has something important to say about this claim: "Many exhort, with more or less objectionable statements, that something is necessary on the part of the believer in order to be filled with the Spirit; and that is usually defined as a full surrender. Let him make the surrender, and he will experience the blessedness of the new life. Such terms as 'a baptism of the Spirit,' 'the second blessing,' 'the higher

life,' 'perfect love,' 'entire sanctification,' etc., have been applied to this experience, but under whatever name it is an **experience**, and it is made dependent upon the surrender of self, as it is called.

"Now, while I do not doubt that many a child of God has received distinct and marked blessings at certain stages of his spiritual growth, I believe it is a great mistake to construct a theory out of it. Many a devoted Christian has enjoyed the liberty of the Spirit under some such name as indicated above. But, notice: It occupies one with Self instead of Christ. It may be a very lovely Self, but self-occupation never helps the soul. It begets a subtle (and often not so subtle) pride. It tends to divide God's people into classes; some have experienced the 'blessing,' and others have not. Now, while it is perfectly true that there are various stages of maturity in the Christian life, and while Scripture speaks of 'fathers, young men, and children' (I John 2), yet it is not in the way of **attainment**. People do not set themselves to be spiritual fathers, etc. It is a matter of **growth**. Further, surrender is not what God calls for first, nor in this connection. You will find that where these systems call for surrender, God's Word puts the CROSS! (See Chap. 12, in **The Green Letters**.)

"It is not a surrendered Self, but a crucified Self whereby the Spirit of God fills and uses the believer. The sixth of Romans comes before the twelfth! In the latter we have the surrender, but it is not to get, or to attain; it is because he has entered into what is his; he has accepted the precious and wondrous fact of his death **with** Christ, and of the Spirit's presence and power.

"A crucified man has no experience to boast of. To him his Lord Jesus Christ is all! Not surrender, but death—an accomplished death—in the Person of the Lord Jesus and His Cross (Gal. 2:20). So let us ever say with Paul, 'God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world' (Gal. 6:14)." "For to me to live is Christ." —(The Person and Work Of the Holy Spirit, by S. Ridout. Highly recommended.)

Let it be said here that the contents of this booklet are not meant to be an attack upon the memory of Mrs. Penn-Lewis, Dr. R.A. Torrey, or any of the other outstanding conservative leaders involved in the teaching of the so-called Baptism of the Spirit. This is rather a matter of putting our Lord, and

the Truth of His Word, ahead of any and all, no matter how venerated they may have been by many of us.