

Leonard Ravenhill:

Some simpleton, trying to fill in the Grand Canyon with a shovel, would evoke gales of laughter and would suffer scorn and unbearable vituperation. No man will ever fill in that hole - not even with any army of bulldozers (never mind a one-man shovel operation).

We Christians are a "holey" people. There are holes everywhere in and about our theology. There is a big hole or gap between what we read in the Book and what we practice. There is also a chasm in our church life. We seem at this hour to be as far removed from apostolic Christianity as the pope is from marriage. We are strangers from the commonwealth of the divine power of Pentecost. We are aliens to that city-moving endowment that was known to our spiritual fathers of the first decade in Pentecost.

I remember on one occasion using a tin of well-advertised paint. The "fast-color, quick-drying, permanent-finish" selling line hooked me. But my experiment was a flop. Was the paint at fault? No, the painter was the transgressor. He did not read the directions, and so the results could not come out right. For an outpouring of the Spirit let us as Christians go back to the Bible directions.

Even before a return to the Bible, we might ask a searing question: "Do we want another Reformation in the Biblical style?" A second not-too-easy question is this: "Do we really want a Pentecostal visitation of the Spirit that will shatter our status quo spiritually, socially, and economically?" (Let me inject a stop signal here: Unless you can answer yes to both these questions, don't pass on.)

Our investigation into "Pentecost at any cost" is not merely to find an answer to empty pews nor yet to solve that preacher's headache, the Sunday night congregation. It is not merely a short-cut to getting our particular church or denomination on its feet. The answer to that problem is simple - get it on its knees. Our rediscovery of Pentecost may bring these several changes within a church; or on the other hand, it is possible that the new wine might burst the old bottles.

If we want to, we can get back to Pentecost. But the road up this hill of blessing is steep. (I am assuming here that my readers believe the Bible to be the inspired, infallible, imperishable Word of God, and that it is no mere theological cliché to say, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8)).

The first hurdle blocking this road to spiritual recovery is this:

The Price of Reproach

Even suggest tarrying and right off some will dub us Pentecostals (as if that matters).

Or, we would get jerking thumbs and out-of-the-side-of-the-mouth comments like this one: "They are trying to be super-spiritual" - an appendage we all would like at the judgment seat of Christ.

Or some might even term us "lazy" for escaping work for some period.

Or, if, with our fetters off, we leap for joy-in heart if not on our feet-then out from the critics would come the shattering phrase, "They are drunk" We could hardly take that!

Another reproach might be the fact that the manner of the Holy Spirit and His method of directing worship would be so anti-orthodox that the unmoved believers might be again heard to say, "They are unlearned and ignorant men " The flesh hates to be slighted intellectually by the intellectuals. Can we pay the price of reproach?

Well then, if the reproach is not too great, if the price is not too high, if the sacrifice is not too involved, and if the stigma is not too humiliating, we can consider the next step to spiritual recovery.

The Price of Disruption

"Of course we do not have to tarry these days," say the expositors, "because," they add, "this is the dispensation of the Holy Spirit." Dispensationally (if one may dare to use that often-abused word) they are right.

But I still hold that we need to tarry.

First, take notice that this tarrying would mean a shattering of our own little program. The Holy Spirit is no one's errand boy. The Holy Spirit does not move at our beck and call. He cannot be slighted by frail human will without serious consequence. For spiritual recovery He must be obeyed. Only let calamity come, and we will all want to be spiritual. Stock market addicts miss their shrine of Mammon when there is personal or domestic calamity or a national day of prayer (called usually when there is no other way out). A "rat in a trap" turns many to prayer. But do we pray when we are not in a trap?

We need to remember that wars always bring disruption. In London, England, just after the second world war, I saw from the outside balcony of St. Paul's Cathedral an ugly slab of concrete far below. The upper crust of that slab was thirty feet thick, the guide told me. Beneath it and in comparative safety, Winston Churchill, his cabinet, and his military advisors, spent many a sleepless night plotting military strategy in an attempt to out-manuever a crafty foe. Especially was this disruption true when England was "going it alone," and Hitler's flesh-pounding juggernauts were only twenty miles across the English Channel.

While the top brass were thus engaged, the lesser fry were fire-watching. That meant each man had a certain night that in pouring rain or in hail from falling shrapnel, he would walk the street and if need be put out incendiary bombs. It was a risky task. But here was compulsion to duty as well as a bit of the disruption that all war brings.

In the holy war against the devil and his works, can we be choosy in our obedience? Can we pray when we like? Can we seek the fulness of the Spirit when we are so disposed? No! If we are aware that now is the time for God to do a new thing, then precedents will be shattered.

This brings us to another hurdle, the third:

The Price of Waiting

We need this waiting to get it clear in our minds that Holy Ghost visitation would not have to fit into our preconceived theological orbit. We need the waiting:

- for humiliation and for time for a confession of our too-long-a-time satisfaction with our own works.
- to get our spiritual eyes refocused on the holiness of God and the lostness of men.
- to linger until we have a broken and contrite spirit.
- to prove we can master the claims of this materialistic age in which we live.
- to hear again the living voice of the living God.
- to show our utter disregard for our own efforts and our complete dependence upon the living God for deliverance in this sin-dominated age.
- to convince our skeptical friends that we love the will of God, that we long for the favor of God, and that we seek the power of God with more zeal than we put into our business lives and with greater hunger than we have for food.
- for a sorrowful confession of sin and pleading for cleansing through the blood of Christ. In the divine presence, vows would be made to put wrongs right and to remain submissive to God's revealed will. I believe that then the Spirit would fall.

Is the fire and fervor of the early church as revealed in the Acts of the Apostles the norm for the church of Jesus Christ? We believe it is. Jesus came that we might have life "more abundantly," life with glow and with flow and with overflow.

The Spirit does not discriminate as to a man's position in a church. The Spirit falls on a Saul and makes him a Paul and an apostle. The Spirit endues a Philip, and he turns the city of Samaria upside down and ransacks the devil's kingdom.

Supernatural evidence has accompanied every revival. The external miracles have been greater in some operations than in others. But - and this is the core of the thing - signs and wonders were done; the rationalists and materialists were stirred, and at times silenced.

To revival there is peril and pain - pain for the birth of revival, pain from the scorn of others while revival is in progress, and pain when the fire of revival dies down.

Repeatedly the question has been asked, "Why does revival come in a blaze, but to the delight of the critics soon sputter and die out?" The answer to that question could be one or two of these things (at times maybe both): First: Ignorance could quench the Spirit - an inability to hear the voice of the Lord for the next move. Second: Disobedience - this seems the most likely thing to douse the flame that seeks to consume all the dross. There might be other causes such as laziness to follow the close schedule that the Spirit demands, or there might be smug satisfaction that there is now some "life."

Let us remind ourselves again that the early church "moved." In moving, something or somebody must be left behind. The modern Ananias and Sapphira will find the pace too hot and the price too high. To keep the fire of revival burning, we would have to meet together

- daily for prayer and praise. This is what the church in Acts did (Acts 2:42-46).
- daily for breaking of bread. This the early church did.
- daily for prayer. This was their pattern in the early church.
- in the harmony of the Spirit. This was the glow of the first church.

This stringent schedule would be the death of many of our flimsy and unproductive patterns of life. How easily we Christians move along in the light of the lostness of men and their gambling with the certainty of eternal destruction unless they hear and believe. Sloth has seeped into our endeavors. The mesmerism of materialism has almost completely clogged the channel of blessing. We stand condemned.

Almost every Christian without exception knows better than to live at his present standard of spirituality. "My brethren, these things ought not so to be." There is only one way for the church to operate - God's way. The Bible is the blueprint of this way.

Here, then, is the way back to Pentecost and on to glory!

Quick, in a moment, infinite
for ever,
Send an arousal better than
I pray;
Give me a grace upon the
faint endeavor,
Souls for my hire and
Pentecost today!

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