

The Deeper Significance of Pentecost

By Frank Bartleman

Frank Bartleman was a man of passion and deep burden. His prayers literally opened the heavens, and his messages were withering to all that was of the flesh. Everything that stood as an obstruction to the full exaltation of Jesus Christ as Lord of all became the object of his travailing prayer and was ruthlessly opposed by his fearless pen and tongue. But Frank Bartleman was more than an intercessor and more than a dauntless revivalist. He was a man of vision - a prophet! He perceived a deeper significance of what the Holy Spirit was after in revival and called upon God's people to go on to that ultimate. His voice, although so long silent, now once again goes forth. The following message was delivered in about 1925 shortly before his death.

THE WORLD IS THE FIELD, the true Church is the treasure – like a kernel in a shell. But the great nominal Church, the ecclesiastical body in each generation, is also like a field in which the true spiritual Church – the living Church – like a treasure, is hidden.

But even this true, spiritual Church is far from being the treasure of Divine life and power originally planned and provided for in the purpose of God. Ever since the early Church fell from New Testament purity and life, she has been like a backslider, fallen from the summit of apostolic days – though destined to return and yet enter into the full blessing of the Father's house.

I refer to the true, spiritual Body of Christ. It is a "prodigal son," wandered from the Father's house, but since the Reformation gradually returning. Nearly five centuries have now passed since the Reformation. The route back has been devious and long, with many a dark valley, as well as many a glorious summit. But steadily, relentlessly, the mighty Spirit of God has been moving on, restoring that which was lost and heading things up toward that great prophetic revelation of the Body of Christ in unity and fullness – even one Body, fully matured "unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ!" (Eph.4:13)

Beloved, unless we understand this, we will not be able to move on with God and understand the different stages, experiences, and various standards and operations in the Church's history during this dispensation. That is why most Christians have failed to move on with God and to accept His cumulative unfoldings in the restoration of revelation, light and experience, once lost, but now being restored to the true Church.

If you do not fully see this, or if it seems to differ from your present idea of things, do bear with me. Before I am finished, I believe you will understand, and, if so, it may well transform your life, giving new and vital direction to your prayers and ministry.

THE HEART OF OUR TROUBLE

The human soul is ever lazy toward God, and no one generation has seemed to be able to travel very far on its way back to God and His standard from which the early Church fell. It is true that human error or understanding continually satisfies itself with a part instead of the whole, but the real fact is that men are not willing to pay the full price to come back fully to God's standard, to be all the Lord's.

The early Church came forth from the "upper room" fresh in her "first love," (Rev.2:4) baptized with the Holy Spirit, filled with God, possessing both the graces and gifts of the Spirit, and with a one hundred percent consecration for God. This was the secret of her power. She was all for God,

and God was all for her. This principle will apply in all ages, both individually and collectively. No sacrifice on the altar means no fire. The fire of God never falls on an empty altar. The greater the sacrifice, the more the fire.

When the prodigal gets home, and the Church becomes one hundred per cent for God again, we will have the same power, the same life – and the same persecution from the world. The reason we have so little persecution now is that the Spirit cannot press the claims of God home on the world through us. When that happens, men must either surrender or fight.

“Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever!” (Heb.13:8) God never changes. We have changed. We are not waiting for God. God is waiting for us. The Holy Spirit is given, we are still in the dispensation opened on the day of Pentecost. But God can only work when we are willing, yielded, and obedient. We tie God’s hands.

The history of the Church has been the same. Each company that has come forth in the line of restoration has run the same course. That is, human, fallen nature. It is human failure, not God’s. When everything dries up and dies out, we call upon God. This alone makes it possible for God to come. He must have some place to put His Spirit, and only empty vessels can be filled.

When we are filled with our own ways, think ourselves rich and increased in goods spiritually, (Rev. 3:17) God can give us nothing. To the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet. (Prov.27:7) The crumbs tasted good to the Syro-Phoenician woman, but well-fed children despise even dainties. (See Matt.15:21-28) They will throw the food across the table at one another. Like the children of Israel, they despise even “angels’ food.” (Ps.78:23)

The best preacher in the land cannot preach with liberty when his message is not desired or received. The oil ceases to flow as soon as there are no more empty vessels to be filled. This will often explain why good preachers sometimes have liberty and at other times have no anointing. Criticism will stop the flow of oil through any preacher. Oil will not flow when frozen.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

The early Church ran well for a season. Everything went down before it. But by the third or fourth century, they had compromised to escape the cross. They sold out to the devil, backslid, and went down into the “Dark Ages.” They lost the Holy Spirit anointing, the gifts, the life, the power, the joy, everything. The Church became a prodigal, left the Father’s house, and went to feeding swine.

The devil found he could not stamp out the early Church by killing them. For every one he killed, two sprang up. Like the children of Israel, “the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew.” (Ex.1:20) The early Christians vied with one another for a martyr’s crown. They exposed themselves purposely, recklessly, for this reward. Someone has said the greatest call that ever came to man is the call to suffer in a noble cause.

Heaven was real to the early Church - far more real than earth. In fact, they seemed to have lived only for the next age. That was their longing, their goal, to be delivered from “this present evil world,” (Gal.1:4) It was the sole relief they looked forward to. This present life, after all, is the true saints purgatory. It is the sinners heaven - his only heaven - and that is sad beyond words to express! But, glory to God, it is our only hell! we are in the enemies country, running the gauntlet, with foes lined up on all sides - but we are just passing through.

Without question, it was God’s desire to restore the backslidden, prodigal Church at once, when she fell, just as He must have desired at once to restore the human race in the beginning when they fell. But He could not. Human, fallen nature was too weak.

God also wanted to take the children of Israel right into Canaan from Kadesh-Barnea when he brought them out of Egypt. It was only a short journey, but they frustrated His purpose and desire. “They grieved God and limited the Holy One of Israel” (Ps78:41) just as it has ever been. In consequence, they stopped going forward, went to “milling around,” and “their carcasses fell in the wilderness.” (Heb.3:17)

Beloved, whenever we stop going forward, we go to “milling around.” When an individual stops going forward for God, he begins to go in a circle. Just as a man when lost in a forest ceases to go straight forward but wanders in a circle.

So it was with the early Church. When they ceased to go forward, they started wandering in a circle and became lost in the Dark Ages. The devil had found he could not destroy them or stop their march by persecuting and killing them, so he removed the cross, offering them titles, positions, honor, salaries, profits of every kind – and they fell for it.

They no longer needed to look to God for their protection and support. They were “like the nations round about them,” just as the children of Israel when they rejected God as their King. (See Deut. 17:14) And it is so with our great church bodies of today. History repeats itself in every movement through human weakness and failure.

THE REFORMATION AND SUBSEQUENT HISTORY

Out of the Dark Ages came the great ecclesiastical, Roman hierarchy, which in time dominated the whole world, both political and religious. And the same condition has developed out of every fallen movement. An illegitimate, hybrid monster has come forth.

This was the condition of the formal church in Martin Luther’s time. However, the living seed of the true Church had remained buried in this mass, even through those long, dark centuries. This seed now began to spring up and germinate – the Church within the Church. The prodigal backslider began to come to himself at last and desire to return home. The Church had fed on swine long enough!

Through the labors of such men as Huss, Wycliffe, Luther, Foxe, Wesley, Darby, Mueller, Moody, Evan Roberts, Wigglesworth, and a host of others, the prodigal Church has been coming home. But each company which God has been able to bring forth and give a fresh deposit of the Spirit and of the truth once lost, has sooner or later stopped short of the full goal. Although often gaining much ground and experiencing tremendous blessing, each group has ceased to go forward as a body and completely return to the early New Testament standard and realization.

Again and again the Church climbed from the depths of some sectarian stranglehold, with its various stages of formalism and spiritual darkness, only to fall again, within perhaps only a generation, into sometimes an even worse state. Fortunately, each time, some new light and understanding of truth and God’s ways was given upon which the next revival company could build. But in it all, it is the failure of man, not God’s failure. Each company has only gone so far. It was certainly God’s desire to fully restore the early Church to her first estate and love love at once, as it is true with every backslider. To think otherwise is to charge God with sin. But the Church would not.

A backslider does not get back to God in a moment. He generally has more or less of a battle to get back, according to the light and experience that he has sinned against. The early Church had great light and experience. If it were too easy to be fully restored, it would be too easy to backslide.

There is a natural law that is similar to this. Faith has been broken down. It is like a case of tuberculosis, where the tissues of the lungs have been destroyed. It is a hard fight back, even under favorable circumstances of rest and climate. To return to the “lowlands” generally means a return of the disease. So it is with the restored backslider. He must keep away from temptation ground and aggressively walk in obedience.

Today we can look back and see the different companies that, in the line of restoration, God has brought out in the Church since the Middle Ages. We can see where they ceased to go forward with God, where they began to mill around in a circle, and where their carcasses fell in the wilderness as a body – Lutherans, Anglicans, Congregationalists, Methodists, Salvation Army, and so forth. They ceased to be a forward company.

Whenever we cease to go forward and keep on the offensive for God, we stop and die as a people. In fact, a movement is no longer a movement when it stops moving – be it the Holiness movement, the Pentecostal movement, or any other movement. It may continue to increase both in number and in wealth, but that is not necessarily a sign of life and power with God. All anti-Christian movements can show that kind of growth. No movement has ever recovered itself as a body, when it has once gone on the skids.

GOD’S MOVEMENT

We do not have to leave movements. We simply move on with God! As long as a movement moves, we move with it. The different movements in the history of the church, although part of His true restoration, are only incidental with God. God has one great movement we should all belong to, and that has never ceased moving. It is God’s move through the ages to redeem a fallen, lost world and carry that great blood-washed assembly on to His eternal purpose. It began when the Lamb was slain before the foundation of the world (Rev.13:8) and will end when the last saint gets safely home to glory.

We must work for the Kingdom of God as a whole, not for some pet individual party, organization, or movement. That has been the curse and cause of hindrance to our going on with God to full restoration in all generations. We have worshipped certain doctrines, party standards, partial experiences, and blessings, all fine as far as they go, but abnormal in themselves and only a part of the whole.

Most of these have been unbalanced, exaggerated misstatements of truth at best. In the end, they have generally brought bondage in place of blessing. They have broken fellowship, divided the children of God, and put the Church in bondage to men and their ideas, standards, understandings, and opinions.

We must keep moving! The clearest light on truth and experience has not yet come. We still wait for the full restoration of the “pattern shown in the mount,” that of the early New Testament Apostolic Church as a whole.

The great mistake has been to stop with sectarian, partial, abnormal revelations. We must keep our eyes on God, not on a party. Keep free from a party spirit. That is indicative of a respect of persons. Seek only God and His plan as a whole, His Church as a whole.

Every company, in time, repeats the experience of the early Church. They compromise to escape the cross and accept positions, salaries, titles, and ecclesiastical power. An ecclesiastical hierarchy arises just as it did in the early Church during the second and third centuries.

The backslidden Church is still in an abnormal condition. It will continue to be so until it becomes fully restored to the first standard of apostolic Christianity from which it fell. No experience or revelation in the line of gradual restoration has been perfect in itself. All is abnormal, both in understanding and experience, until the perfect whole is realized and restored.

We need a readjustment of all our doctrines to the full, clear light of God in the Word. All past experiences must be examined and redefined in the light of the perfect whole.

Someone has said that every reformation is at its best and highest tide when it first comes forth. This would seem to be so, but at the same time the true Church is ever moving on to maturity. I speak of the Church within the Church, the kernel in the shell, not the surrounding movement. Just as the individual believer who goes on with God gradually matures, so the Church within the Church is maturing toward the end of the age when she will be a full-grown Church. The goal is not just the standard lost by the early Church but that toward which they themselves were pressing – “a fully matured man,” even “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph.4:13).

APOSTASY AND RECOVERY

As with Israel in the Exodus, the “mixed multitude,” (Ex.12:38) the exterior shell of every movement with which it loads itself and in which it later becomes buried, falls to lusting for “flesh.” One can usually judge the progress of this process by the things the movement comes to demand. Instead of delight in the pure Word, prayer and worship, a love for souls and zeal for good works, there comes entertainment, programs, musicals, sensationalism, and oratory. These things have no place in essential, true Christianity, but are professionalism – flesh! Oh, God, deliver us from fleshly substitutes for the Spirit.

Most meetings can only be kept alive now by continuous entertainment, professional evangelism, and a strong social spirit. And this is all too true in Pentecostal, Holiness, and interdenominational circles, as well as in the older denominations. Where is the life itself to draw the people and bring God to them as in the beginning! This is not New Testament. It is abnormal, grieving and limiting the Holy One of Israel in our midst.

Each movement seems to run its course faster than the one before it. Like the Niagara river, it flows downwards more swiftly as it approaches the falls, the end of time. These are the last days of apostasy.

The fight gets harder as we get higher up in our restoration from the early Church’s fall. When Adam fell, the Satanic powers intervened between the fallen race and God. God removed the seat of His presence with man from earth to heaven. So when the early Church fell, she again lost the image of God which had, in a sense, been restored in New Testament days when the body of believers became the Temple of the Holy Spirit. In a higher sense than Adam had known, the “spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph.6:12) intervened between the Church and God again. Now, the prodigal Church, coming up out of the Dark Ages, has had to fight her way back through these evil powers. Each movement, as we go higher toward full restoration, has to meet a higher order of these wicked spiritual powers and intelligences and hence must fight harder.

Each step forward necessarily requires a deeper preparation and greater spiritual equipment for a greater measure of restoration. It was never God’s decree that the experience of the Church should be so long and drawn out in recovering the normal standard and going on to fullness. But we have ever sought to call our present abnormal understanding and experience normal. We must see that all has been abnormal since the early Church’s fall.

Experiences, understanding – everything has been partial, unbalanced, and abnormal. Nothing has been perfectly understood, and all the different truths and experiences have only been parts of the whole.

We have not understood these truths and experiences, just as no machine is properly and clearly understood in detail except as we understand the whole. We have been recovering the whole, in parts, without seeing the whole – thus we so often distort and overemphasize the truth or experience that our particular movement has recovered. I trust you grasp this, for it is very important.

The New Testament church in the Book of Acts entered normally into the fullness of the Spirit immediately at its inception, as for instance at Cornelius' household in the tenth chapter of Acts. The different phases of our salvation were all viewed as just so many parts of one glorious, normal whole. But all the various movements in the restoration, since the early reformers, have ceased in their turn to go forward to full realization. They have established their party standard of a partial, abnormal revelation, putting a part for the whole. Then, in human vanity, they have each contended they had it all.

This is sectarianism, and it is like a lot of dams holding back God's people from flowing on toward the vast ocean of God's fullness. God cares little for these partial standards of men – their names, sects or parties, slogans or standards. All is only partial distorted light which finally becomes the enemy of the real truth as the Lord marches on to glory.

Each oncoming wave of the sea toward high tide must fight its way through the last receding one. So it is with the different movements toward a final restoration of the Church. The immediately receding one especially hates and opposes the next oncoming one. What fools the devil has made of us! Oh, that we might see it! However real and good, as far as they have gone, these past revivals and movements are each but faltering, uncertain steps toward the final goal.

LET'S GO ON!

God has but one Church, whether in heaven, where most of it is, or here on earth. And there is yet very much land to be possessed before we realize the Divine purpose to which we are destined. We must recognize the whole body of Christ. In our human thoughts, we fail to recognize God when we meet Him. Those who dare to go further with God toward the full restoration are denounced and opposed by others as if they were of the devil. And this was not just true of Luther and the Catholic Church – it was also true of Wesley and the Anglican Church, of Booth and the Methodist Church, and so on. And it is still true today. But, beloved, we must face it – the backslider has not yet been fully restored, the prodigal has not yet reached home. We must keep moving on!

Elijah's rain came out of a clear sky, without even the sign of a cloud to begin with – the result of faith alone. So the Pentecostal outpouring came in 1906. And this has been the case with every revival. Revival is the property of faith, not sight. There is nothing for sight to see in fallen nature but hopelessness. Revival and restoration must come from God, out of a clear sky. We are earthly and fleshly, but God is Spirit. God's Word is "spirit and life," (John 6:63) and faith in that Word brings the living God on the scene regardless of circumstances or outward prospects.

Will God visit His people again? Why not? As surely as He has done it in the past, He will do it again. God's skies are full of Pentecosts. He only waits for us to claim them. Do we not need one? Then we can have it, when we are willing to pay the price of obedient faith.

The Church is not fully restored. No past group, after it has waned, has had the faith and vision to move God to visit them again. If they had, they would not be strewn along the way as more or less dead movements, their bones bleaching in the wilderness. None of them had future faith. They

stopped short of the goal. None of them went clear through. “They limited the Holy One of Israel,” (Ps.78:41) just as we do today. They would not pay the price. That was the trouble.

But worse than this, they justified themselves in their abnormal standards and opposed and condemned others who would go further ... and still they do so.

The sin of the Jewish high church in Jesus’ time was the same. They refused to go further themselves and set themselves in their backslidden condition to oppose all who wished to go forward. That spelled their doom, and it will bring down the judgments of God on any denomination, movement, or group who follow in their steps.

But a Gideon’s band is forming again today. Faith is rising. Another visitation from God is coming. It is only the Gideon’s band that can ever bring or receive it – only a praying, consecrated, pilgrim band. They of the “mixed multitude” (Ex.12:38) will not be in it, for they are too many and too fleshly. “Upon man’s flesh” the Lord said of the precious anointing oil in the tabernacle, “Shall it not be poured.” (Ex.30:32) God usually has to work with the little things, the weak things – the small, consecrated groups.

“I will pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground.” (Is.44:3) Dryness is a condition that invites rain. At such times men cry for rain. It is a cause for encouragement when we thirst for God. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst, for they shall be filled. (Matt.5:6) It was after an awful drought that Elijah’s rain came. The rain is ready, beloved – when we want it, and when we are in a condition to receive it.

We must have the spirit of Caleb and Joshua, a different spirit from the multitude. They “wholly followed the Lord,” (Num.32:12) therefore, they entered Canaan with the next company to go forward. They had their portion in it, while the old crowd died in the wilderness. No movements, as a movement, has ever gone all the way through to full restoration for the reasons I have explained. Hence, we must never become the property of or limit ourselves to, a party or a movement. Worship only God. Join God in His great movement. Keep moving!

THE END IS NEARING

We are rounding the corner toward complete recovery. God is again pressing His full claims upon His Church and upon the world in this, the end of the age. But the devil is also pressing his claims with great vigor. Whom will we serve? It is either one hundred per cent for God or for the devil – there is no neutral ground. We are nearing the awesome climax of this deadly war between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Each must be at his best for his side.

A normal Church is always one hundred per cent for God. There can be no flirting with the enemy. The Church has no other business than to carry the Gospel to the world and press the claims of God upon His own. All its energies and resources should be used with that one object in view. “Then shall the end come.” (Matt.24:14) God waits for this.

Nothing but the zeal and the one hundred per cent consecration of the early Church, both in laboring for the salvation of the nations and in building up the one true world-wide Church, will or can satisfy God. He will accept no substitutes or compromise with our ideas and fleshly plans. There simply must be an utter abandonment to His full will and His great eternal purpose in His own children! Nothing short of this can clear our conscience and responsibility in the day of judgment. We could have done this long ago – if we had willed to do so – but we have not. Oh, let us not delay longer, but at once go right up and storm the enemy’s citadels, vowing never to withdraw our sword until Jesus comes and the whole land is ours!

We are rapidly approaching the last days. I am convinced that God is going to put the Church through the fire to destroy the dross. Judgment begins at the house of God. (1Pet.4:17) And, believe me, nothing but one hundred per cent reality will remain! A theoretical salvation will not do.

We are reaching the culmination of this age, and nothing but a practical application of the Gospel can hope to survive. All else will be destroyed by the fires of worldwide persecution. God can only defend obedience to His Word. Never fear - He is going to have a Church without spot and wrinkle. (Eph.5:27) But do you and I want to have a part of it? A sectarian competitive, selfish, self-seeking Church cannot survive. The Church must return to the spirit of the early Church in the Book of Acts. She must yield to God and press into His "present truth" (2Pet.1:12) for this last hour - or perish in the fires of persecution and in her own blood. "*Our God is a consuming fire.*" (Heb. 12:29)!

Let us go on!

Frank Bartleman - 1925