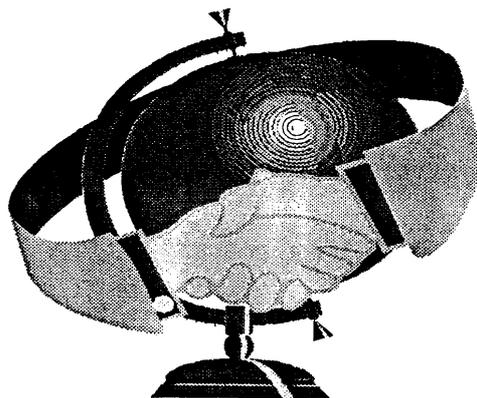


**HE
MUST
INCREASE**



Restoration *Truth*
by
Donald A. Dunn

HE MUST INCREASE

On a previous ministry visit to the fellowship, I'd got to know Steve and Becky when we shared a meal together in their home. Glad to see Steve in the congregation, I wondered where Becky was. Was she on nursery duty? Was she nursing a sick child? I shook hands with Steve and was shocked to learn that Becky had taken herself away from the fellowship and was now attending another!

At my suggestion we met for a cup of tea later that day. After exchanging pleasantries, Becky was only too eager to share her reasons for changing fellowships. For the next half an hour I listened to her very "spiritual" reasons for leaving the church without her husband. Until recent times I would have been impressed by her sharing. However, when she insisted I comment, I reluctantly complied. Becky, I have listened carefully to your reasons for leaving Hillside, but, rather than finding the Lord in your words, I hear mostly self worship." Becky became very quiet after that!

Her needs, her criticism of others, her spirituality was what I had heard for all that time. Becky was a lovely young woman, a good mother and homemaker. She was generous, thoughtful and loving, to a point. After all, what about her rights, her considerations, her needs? Although Becky loved her family, friends and church, there were some issues she could not quite prefer others before herself, including Jesus. She needed to decrease and let the Lord Jesus Christ increase in her life.

When Jesus was crucified and buried, the first disciples were very aware that they had lost everything. They had given up their homes, their careers, and their lives. But now, the One they had given it all up for, was gone. Stunned by the unexpected turn of events, they huddled behind barred doors, anticipating the worst. With nowhere to

go and no one to turn to, they totally concentrated on the Lord. They knew that without Him they had nothing!

When the news reached them that the tomb was empty, they were overwhelmed. They knew the Lord was the reason for everything. Jesus was central and supreme. His was the Name above all names. Later, when they had received the power of the Holy Spirit, they went everywhere preaching, ‘This Jesus whom you crucified is both Lord and Christ—supreme ruler and Saviour.

Their humanity and carnal natures would always be a problem, but as year followed year they retained their focus: Jesus is Lord. If He wanted to minister to the Samaritans through Philip, that was His business, If He wanted to include the Gentiles through Peter and later Paul that was His ultimate authority. Regardless of the circumstances, the Lord Jesus Christ remained central and supreme. Every now and then, the carnal nature would endeavour to take over. But for at least as many years as our Bible covers, every attack was repulsed. He remained King of Kings and Lord and Lords to the believers. The Gospels and letters of John the Apostle were written about 90 A.D. So the Lord was still paramount in His church at that stage. Every manifestation of the world, the flesh, and the devil was kept subordinate to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Where did the change begin? We can only speculate. Paul wrote that after his departure men and human traditions would move in. Unless there is a total commitment to the lordship of Jesus Christ, men will always move in and take over. Jackson makes this point in his book No Other Foundation:

Although the lapse of time between Creation and the Fall is not specified, the Genesis account makes it fairly clear that it was distressingly short. Pressure

was quickly brought to bear upon the New Testament Church by declension and heresy. For every Old Testament Achan there was a New Testament Ananias and Sapphira.

Now heresy comes from the Greek word meaning “choice”. In its New Testament use, this word also implies the thought of party. Heresy is, therefore, the selfish exercise of choice, and those making selfish choices tend to draw others into their error. The heresy (or exercise of selfish choice) always expands, and truth becomes increasingly distorted. Heresy begins with a waning of our love for and commitment to Jesus. Within the soul there exists a void that causes man to reach for something to fill it. If man does not reach up to Jesus and out to other men, he will reach in to himself. As man does this, his love for Jesus decreases, and his love of self, increases. When such a process takes place within our lives, it must be dealt with by repentance and obedience to God’s Word.

All heresies focus on Jesus Christ. The idea of God becoming man, taking the punishment for our sin, and earning our salvation challenges the self-centeredness of man. When we receive the grace of God through the Lord Jesus Christ, we are overwhelmed with gratitude. All too soon, however, the old independent nature begins to contend with the new-found dependence on God. The flesh begins to rise again. The world seduces the mind. The devil continues to whisper, “Has God really said...” Little by little the balance changes. Without unbroken reliance on the Holy Spirit to lead, guide and strengthen us, the Lord Jesus begins to decrease and the traditions of men begin to increase.

This seems to be the process that began to accelerate from about 100 A.D. onwards. As one by one the original apostles were transferred to heaven, the selfish choices of ambitious men began to predominate.

In 313 A.D., Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, officially tolerating the church and ending persecution. Within a comparatively short time, church leaders started copying the structures, titles and attitudes of the Roman Empire. The resulting adjustments ushered in the Dark Ages. Whenever we ignore the evidence of our own weaknesses or attempt to deal with our humanity by religious activities rather than by repentance and faith in God's Word, we too bring 'the dark ages' into our lives. Only by bringing our attention back to the risen, triumphant Lord can we renew our first love, and restore triumphant Christian living to our earthly pilgrimage.

Even when decline sets in and men settle for a mere shell of the true faith, God is still at work. The Holy Spirit will always be labouring to bring honour to the Head of the Church. Historians tend to label this on-going process of resurrection as "reformation" when in reality it is "restoration." Throughout history, the Holy Spirit has restored both individuals and the church as a whole to a right relationship with the Lord using men such as Luther and many others as instruments of restoration. The Azusa Street Revival at the beginning of the 20th century is a powerful example of the Holy Spirit's ongoing efforts to restore the church to a right relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The following excerpts from Vinson Synan's introduction to Frank Bartleman's Azusa Street is clear evidence that God unleashed the power of the Holy Spirit in a manner unknown since the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts chapter 2:

"In 1898, Charles Parham, a former Methodist minister established a Bible School in Topeka, Kansas. By 1900 he had about forty students studying in an old brick mansion on the outskirts of town. In January 1901, one of Parham's students, eighteen-year-old Agnes Osman, received the baptism in the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues under the inspiration of the Spirit. The enduement with power from

on high swept through the school and out into the Christian community. Among those touched by this wave of revival was a black preacher, William Seymour, who soon became the central figure in the Azusa Street Revival. He will always be remembered as the chosen vessel chosen by the Lord to spark the world-wide Pentecostal revival.”

As the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Azusa Street revival is commemorated In 1981, it is possible to reflect on the importance of this watershed event in Christian history... In 1981, Pentecost has come to Rome itself as millions of Roman Catholics rejoiced in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In 1975, over 10,000 Catholics gathered in St. Peter’s to celebrate the Pentecost season. In a memorable service Charismatics rejoiced as Pope Paul VI gave his endorsement to the movement. At the climax of that service, thousands spoke and sang in other tongues. In 1987 a similar Pentecostal service was held in Canterbury Cathedral, England... It is a long way from St. Peter’s and Canterbury, but in 1981 it is apparent that Pentecost has come not only to Los Angeles but to all the cities and nations of the world.”

God is at work to restore His church to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The Azusa Street Mission is acknowledged as the place where the worldwide revival of Pentecost began. The potential of what could have transpired since this revival’s birth cannot be measured. The Azusa Street Revival brought forth a movement, which by 1980 had changed the lives of perhaps 80,000,000 people. It could have been much more if the Holy Spirit had been continuously allowed to guide the believers—if Jesus would have been continually allowed to increase in each meeting, each life. If worshipping the Lord would have remained the sole focus, the move of God could have had a greater impact on the church, the nation, and the world.

Fortunately, we still have the accounts of God's wonderful outpouring during that time. Frank Bartleman's book, Azusa Street gives us considerable insight into both what had happened and what could have continued to happen.

Azusa Street Mission participants believed it vital that individuals should be changed so that their lives conformed to the Divine plan. They were convinced that as soon as any fellowship began to covet a large following and to rejoice in a crowd of listeners, they were in danger of returning to the apostasy of the past. They believed that 'Calvary' must come before 'Pentecost'. Calvary is a place of death.

If we have died with Christ, if we have reckoned ourselves dead to sin, and if we have discovered that we are alive to Christ, then how can we continue to demand that our views, our interests, our rights, and our needs be considered before the Lord's? If we have died to our carnal natures, its desires, its motivations, then we need to remind ourselves that dead men have no rights. Only by making the commitment of 'Not my will, but Thy will be done' can we truly accomplish what the Lord desires. As we humble ourselves before the Lord, we must decrease so that He can increase through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the following excerpts from Azusa Street we can see how the prevailing views of the believers set the atmosphere to allow the Spirit to sovereignly move:

"In the beginning in 'Azusa' we had no musical instruments. In fact we felt no need of them. There was no place for them in our worship. All was spontaneous.

"Brother Seymour was recognized as the nominal leader in charge. But we had no pope or hierarchy. We were 'brethren'. We had no

human program. The Lord Himself was leading. We had no priest class or priest craft. These things came later with the apostatising of the movement.”

No subjects or sermons were announced ahead of time. No one knew what might be coming, what God would do. All was spontaneous, ordered by the Spirit.

“We wanted God. When we first reached the meeting we set out to meet God first. We got our heads under some bench in the corner in prayer...

We can re-capture the vitality of Azusa Street. It is time for every Christian to seriously consider their relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. Each of us much look within ourselves with all candour and ask “is my life poured out, have I set aside my dreams, my ambitions, my perspectives, and embraced His vision, His goal, His view?” An honest evaluation will reveal that most of us have drifted dangerously close to a faith which is disastrous mixture of apathy, complacency, and the traditions of men. There is no difficulty in identifying this attitude because it is filled with ‘Me, Myself and I’ – self-centeredness, selfishness and self-worship.

There is only one way to stop this degeneration, only one way to return to our first love, only one way to avoid this terrible state of deception. Repentance. Pray now...

Lord, I am sorry. I rend my heart and not my clothes. I refuse to live a life of pretensions, an external show without a commitment. My cry before You is, “Help me to seek Your will before my will, Your way before my way. Lord, help me to decrease, so that You may increase.”

For further information write to...

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