

Azusa Street: The Fire That Could Not Die

- By Rick Joyner

Over the last two millennia the church has experienced many revivals, renewals, and reformation movements. Each has added a wealth of experience and understanding to the ways in which the Holy Spirit moves to reveal Jesus to His church, and to those in darkness. Almost every one of these movements has been progressive in the restoration of biblical truth to the church, truth that was either lost or was neglected during the Middle Ages. Without question, one of the most significant of all of these movements has been the Pentecostal Revival of the twentieth century.

It is impossible to understand the present state of Christianity without understanding both the past and continuing impact of the Pentecostal Movement. To even call what began at Azusa Street just a revival would be to obscure its true importance. It was a revival, but it was also a renewal and a reformation of the church as well. With the possible exception of Luther's Reformation, there probably has not been another movement in church history which has had a greater overall impact on the entire church.

This impact is not only continuing, it is continuing to increase. Through the Pentecostal Revival, and the subsequent Neo-Pentecostal movements spawned from it such as the Charismatic Renewal, already more ministers of the gospel have been ordained, more missionaries have been sent out, more churches have been planted, and more people have been brought to salvation than through any other movement in church history. If the present rate of growth is sustained, soon the numbers of those impacted by this renewal will eclipse the totals of all other movements combined.

To understand how the essence of this movement has been able to mature, while at the same time staying responsive to new moves of the Spirit, is important for every spiritual leader. Many of its churches, and even whole denominations, have continued to reach for greater spiritual power while at the same time sinking their roots deeper into sound biblical truth, making necessary corrections and adjustments while maintaining a forward momentum. Of course this should be the norm, but it has in fact been the exception to the nature of movements. Understanding what has enabled much of the Pentecostal Movement to achieve this is certainly one of the most important lessons we can learn.

It is often hard to imagine as we read the great impact of many of the previous spiritual movements, but most of them lasted a very short time. Rarely has a movement stayed on the cutting edge of what God is doing for more than a decade, and more often it is but a year or two. Even the apostolic move of the first century church faded rapidly into an increasing apostasy shortly after the death of its first leaders. However, defying all of the previous norms for such movements, the Pentecostal Movement has continued to keep moving for almost a century, and there is no end to its continued advance in sight. It is not only still increasing, impacting millions more each year, but its rate of growth is still increasing. Taken as a group, the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements are now the second largest category in all of Christianity. If their present rate of growth is sustained, they will, in just a few years, outnumber the rest of Christianity combined.

Of course, there are many individuals, churches, and even whole denominations that were birthed out of this movement which have stopped moving. In many places one can only find the remnants of the past glory, with little or no continuing fire. Even so, around the world there are multitudes of Pentecostal/Charismatic churches that are ablaze with the presence and activity of God. In countries where the greatest advances of the gospel are now taking place, Pentecostals are usually found at the vanguard.

Like most others, the Pentecostal Movement had a spectacular beginning, followed by upheaval from within, and persecution from without. Many mistakes were made that threatened to sidetrack the entire movement, but most of these were resolved in such a way that they gave even greater stability to the movement, enabling it to continue its advance. The lessons we learn from these situations can help any advancing church or movement.

Understanding the mistakes made by others can help us to avoid the same traps, but before we become too concerned with how to avoid the traps of revival, we probably need to know how to start one! Because the most important step in any journey is the first one, understanding how true moves of God begin is crucial. We will also usually find that, just as the genetic code that determines what a grown man will look like is set at conception, the "genetic code" of entire movements is usually set even before their birth. One of the reasons why the Pentecostal Movement is so unique in church history is because it had such a unique beginning. Much of what can be recognized as its present nature was actually already established by the time it was born.

The Beginning

Foundations are important. The strength and longevity of everything that is built will be affected by the strength of the foundation it is built upon. The church that is built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ will prevail just as He did. Any other foundation will have different results. The apostle Paul also warned that we must be careful how we build upon the foundation. He declared that all "wood, hay and stubble" will be burned up, and that only "gold, silver and precious stones will remain." Therefore, in our studies of churches or movements we should look for things that have proven to be "wood, hay and stubble," which do not last, as well as those things which have proven to be "gold, silver and precious stones," which do last.

The beginning of the Pentecostal Movement is usually marked from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Azusa Street in 1906. There were a number of powerful ministries and movements which both experienced and promulgated the baptism of the Holy Spirit prior to Azusa Street, but none of them had the continuing impact that this one did. It was a true beginning, and it added something to the advancing church that has lasted. The movement has changed, and now has many different streams, but one can recognize what originated at Azusa as the source in most of the moves of God that have set the course of Christianity in this century.

Two Witnesses

William J. Seymour and Frank Bartleman are the two names that are most often recognized as those who were used to start the Azusa Street Revival. They were different in many ways, but they were both young men who had an uncommon desire to know the Lord and see His power restored to the church. Seymour was the unquestioned leader of the revival, and he had the authority on earth, but Bartleman was the intercessor who had authority with God.

Because these men were so different, their stories give us two very different views of the Azusa Street Revival, but ones that do compliment each other to give us a more complete picture. As Seymour was the actual leader of the Azusa Street Revival, we will begin with his story. But first we must go back a little further.

The Grandfather

Charles Fox Parham (1873-1929) presided over a Bible school in Topeka, Kansas. He was a true spiritual father, and many consider him the father of the modern Pentecostal Movement. Even though he would later reject many of his own spiritual children, his part in this movement must be recognized and understood.

Parham was a seeker of God who was constantly challenged by what he viewed as the great chasm between biblical Christianity and the state of the church. He sought the Lord for what he considered to be true, biblical Christianity. As he was keeping a prayer vigil on New Year's Eve, he experienced the spiritual gift of "speaking in tongues," or "glossolalia" in the early hours of January 1, 1901, the precise dawning of the Twentieth Century.

Speaking in tongues, or the use of other spiritual gifts, are by no means unique in church history. Many reformers and revivalists had such experiences. Even so, Parham's experience came at what would be called "the fullness of time," or a time that was ripe for the harvest of a recovered truth. His experience created a great deal of interest, mostly because of the dry and lifeless state of the church at the time. Parham was not known for emotionalism or exaggeration, but rather the opposite. He was conservative and resolute. This gave even more credibility to his experience.

A couple of years after his experience, Parham's health broke down and he was forced to move to Houston where he could stay with friends. His strength recovered and he began another Bible school in the Texas port city. William Seymour became one of his students, but because he was black, and Parham was a strict segregationist, he had to sit outside of the classroom and listen through a door that Parham would leave cracked open for him. Seymour wanted the Lord so much that he would embrace any humiliation to be close to what he felt the Lord was doing, and he was convinced that a new Pentecost was coming to the church.

William J. Seymour was born in Centerville, Louisiana on May 2, 1870. He was the son of former slaves, Simon and Phyllis Seymour. Even after gaining their freedom the Seymours had continued working on a plantation. Young William followed in their footsteps, growing strong in body and spirit, but receiving very little formal education. He taught himself to read so that he could read the Bible. Under the almost constant harassment of the Ku Klux Klan, and the oppressive Jim Crow laws, William became convinced that Jesus Christ was the only true liberator of men. After contracting small pox and losing one eye, he devoted himself to the ministry, proclaiming the gospel of the true liberty of all men through Jesus Christ.

Rejection Marks the Spot

In January of 1906, Seymour left Parham's school to pastor a mission congregation, without having received the baptism that he had sought for so long. Just a week after arriving he was rejected by congregational leaders of the mission who did not like his emphasis on the coming of a new Pentecost. One recurring theme in church history seems to be that most men and women of destiny arrive at their appointed place of destiny because of some level of rejection. We can see the same theme repeated in Scripture, such as in the lives of Joseph, Moses, David, and the Lord Jesus Himself, to name but a few. It seems as if a great disappointment with ourselves or men is simply a prerequisite to being used by God in a great way, especially to begin something new. It could even be said that learning to deal with rejection by men comes on the list of instructions for being a Christian. We should never be surprised by it, but keep our trust and attention on the Lord. He will use every such thing that happens to us for His own good, as well as ours.

Seymour recognized the hand of God in his rejection by the mission, and was content to form a little home prayer group which met regularly for several months. While in the middle of a ten day fast, Seymour and the others in this little group were dramatically baptized in the Holy Spirit, receiving the gift of tongues as well as other charismatic gifts.

Word spread "like fire in a dry wood" about what had happened at Seymour's little prayer group. This was probably caused by the remarkable ministry of Frank Bartleman, who had written a stream of articles and tracts, and constantly moved about the city exhorting churches and prayer groups to seek the Lord for a revival. He longed to see the Lord do in Los Angeles what He had recently done in Wales. After a time, Bartleman began to sense that what was to come to Lost

Angeles would be different from what was happening in Wales, and began to boldly prophesy the coming of "another Pentecost." Bartleman's zeal for the Lord at this time was so great that his wife and friends began to fear for his life. He missed so much sleep and so many meals in order to pray that they did not think that he could last much longer. His response to their plea for moderation was that he would rather die than not see revival.

He Is Still Born In a Stable

As soon as word got out about the experience that came upon Seymour's little prayer group, large crowds of interested people descended on them. To accommodate the large numbers of people, they were forced to rent a rundown old barn-like building in the middle of a black ghetto. At the time no one imagined that the little street that it was on, Azusa, would soon become one of the most famous addresses in the world.

The former mission had a dirt floor and was once used as a livery stable. Many remarked when they came that the Lord Himself had been born in just such a place. The rent was only \$8.00 a month, and it would hold as many as 900 people. Even so, services were soon going almost around the clock to handle the hungry multitudes that were coming.

One of the most remarkable characteristics of this revival from the very beginning was the diversity of the people who were drawn to it. Some considered it unprecedented in church history. Within a week even a prominent Jewish rabbi announced his full support. Soon astounding healings and dramatic conversions were taking place almost daily. The church at the time was very dry, so each testimony went forth like sparks into a dry wood. Newspaper articles would fan the flames even more. Testimonies from the Welsh Revival had stirred multitudes to seek the Lord for revival in America, and the deplorable spiritual state of the country made her ready for it. Because of this, the fire spread faster than possible any previous or subsequent revival in American history.

Seymour started a little paper to teach about the renewal, printing 5,000 copies. They were passed around until they fell apart. Soon he was printing 50,000, but there was no end to the demand.

Within weeks a steady stream of missionaries were coming from every continent on earth. Those who were on the front lines of the battle against the forces of darkness were the most acutely aware that they needed more power. Just as the Lord's own disciples were told that they would receive power to be His witnesses when the Holy Spirit came upon them, this had become the only hope for effective ministry that many of the missionaries had. They seized it like a drowning man grasps a lifesaver. They left Azusa with the power they needed, and soon gospel fires were burning brightly all over the world. In just two years the movement had taken root in over 50 nations, and was thought to have penetrated every U.S. town with a population of more than 3,000.

Because missionaries were some of the first to come, missions remain a fundamental part of the spiritual genetic code of the Pentecostal Movement, and one of its greatest strengths. Throughout the Scriptures it is seen that the power of God has always come in its greatest demonstrations where there was the greatest darkness. The first ones to carry the Pentecostal movement abroad were hardened, seasoned missionaries who greatly appreciated what they had been given. They used the power they had been given, and multitudes of men, women and children were delivered from bondage. Soon missionary reports back to home churches read like a modern book of Acts, adding even more fuel to the fire of the movement at home.

When it was discovered that the greatest demonstrations of the Spirit's power usually came in the darkest, neediest places, it compelled many to go on mission trips just to witness the power of God. This added great strength and depth to the new movement, and kept it growing throughout

the world. Pentecostal children grew up hearing of the testimonies of God's power from missionaries. Because such esteem was given to these missionaries, they often became the children's greatest heroes. Emulating their heroes, many of these children of the early Pentecostal pioneers grew up to be missionaries so that they could live close to such wonderful activities of the Spirit. Others became pastors and evangelists who founded new churches and ministries all across America. Many of them are now leaders of the great Pentecostal churches and denominations. Each of them is like a vast treasure houses filled with stories of the glory of God. They walked with Him and learned His ways. They learned to be host to the Holy Spirit. They grew up believing that the book of Acts was not just a history book, but a living guide for normal church life. Many of their own stories read like a modern book of Acts as they earned their place as elders of the church.

We do not see in order to believe, but we believe in order to see. Because it is basic Pentecostal theology that God is the same today as He was yesterday, that He does everything today that He did in Scripture, true Pentecostals believe in his present working, and so they see it. Most Pentecostals will begin to wonder where they have gone wrong if they are not witnessing regular demonstrations of the power of God. To them it is blasphemy to think that God was an author who wrote just one book and then retired. They must have a living relationship with a living God, and so they do.

This was the experience at Azusa Street. Believers were in constant awe at the works of God in their midst. People forgot to eat or sleep, sometimes for days at a time, because they were so caught up in the presence of the Lord. Like the manna that came from heaven, every day they expected a fresh experience with the Lord. faith built on faith until the humble little mission really had become a window of heaven.

A House of Prayer for All Nations

At any given time the Azusa Mission would be packed with such a diversity of people that some considered this almost as much of a marvel as the extraordinary miracles that were taking place. It began with a few black men and women in a little home group, but soon most of those who came were white. In one meeting over twenty nationalities were counted. Fine ladies could be found lying prostrate on the floor next to domestic servants and washer women. Prominent churchmen and high government officials sat next to hobos. No one seemed to care. They all had one thing in common - they came to receive the Holy Spirit of God.

A Father Tries to Kill His Children

Charles Parham visited Seymour, his former student, in the fall of 1906. He wanted to see for himself the great work that was already the talk of Christians around the world. Seymour was thrilled to have a visit from his mentor, and warmly welcomed him. However, Parham was deeply offended by what he saw. He thought that the various charismatic gifts were too openly demonstrated, and he was appalled by the way so many fell to the ground in apparent trances (one report described Azusa as sometimes resembling "a forest of fallen trees").

Seymour realized that some were faking the manifestations, and believed that these were tares sent by the devil to foul the field of wheat. Even so, he held to the biblical wisdom to let the wheat and tares grow up together. He knew that if he tried to root out the tares, the wheat would also be uprooted - if he stopped that which was not real, he would also quench the Spirit and the work that was real. He determined that the risk of having some problems was acceptable in view of the spiritual benefits at stake. He was right. When he later succumbed to the pressure and changed this policy, the revival quickly died.

Even more than the faking of experiences, Parham was appalled by the unusual social and racial integration. Parham admired the Ku Klux Klan, and especially objected to racial mixing or mingling

during worship and at the altar. However, he did not believe this just out of racial pride, but because of a false doctrine. He believed the great sin of humanity that caused the judgment of the flood was racial mixing, and that Noah was chosen to survive because of his pedigree, being "without mixed blood." This is a tragic and diabolical misunderstanding of Scripture that has been the twisted theological basis upon which many racist groups, including the Nazis, have been built.

The Bible does say that Noah was chosen because "he was perfect in his generations" (see Genesis 6:9 KJV), or literally, "perfect in his genealogy," but this had nothing to do with the mixing of human races. The mixture that so offended the Lord was the mixture of the fallen angels with men which had produced the superhuman "nephilim" (see Genesis 6:4). This was a race that the Lord did not create, and threatened the destruction of men who he did create, which He also planned to redeem. This seems to have been Satan's attempt to preempt the "new creation" man that would be brought forth when the Lord gave His spirit to men.

In contrast to Parham's philosophy, Seymour felt that an essential element of Christianity itself was a unity which saw beyond the barriers of race, color, gender, nation, class or status. This was a demonstration that God is no respecter of persons, and that all believers are truly one in Christ. To him, the Azusa Street Mission was becoming a taste of what true Christianity was meant to be, just as the first Pentecost saw the coming together of those from every nation.

Seymour's leadership of such a renewal marked by interracial equality, harmony and unity is even more remarkable when it is understood that this took place during the most severely segregated time in American history. It was also composed mostly of the two most embittered racial groups - the poor whites and poor blacks. When the revival spread, it was also most readily received in the Southern states where this conflict was then most prevalent.

This is another sign of true revival; the waters of God always flow to the lowest points, and He sends His light to the darkest places. A leading British clergyman, A.A. Boddy, wrote, "One of the most remarkable things [about the revival] was that preachers of the Southern states were willing and eager to go over to those Negro people in Los Angeles and have fellowship with them." Frank Bartleman wrote, "The color line was washed away in the blood."

Charles Parham had been mightily used by God at times, but the seeds of deception from some of his doctrines were maturing at a time when the enemy could make the greatest use of them. This has been another tragic way in which history has continually repeated itself. Those who begin a movement will almost always persecute those who seek to take it further, or who are used to start another subsequent movement. One of the worst curses placed upon biblical Israel for her apostasy was that they would eat their own children. The apostasy of the church has brought this terrible curse upon herself in almost every generation. Spiritual fathers seem to inevitably try to devour their own spiritual children.

When Parham could not force his style of leadership upon the Azusa Street Mission, he denounced it, and started another rival mission at the fashionable Women's Christian Temperance Union Building. This was the first schism in the Pentecostal Movement. When this rival mission failed, he spent the rest of his life denouncing Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival. By this he sealed his own spiritual doom. He continually lost influence and followers until his death in 1929.

The Gift

The Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement began under the leadership of a black man, and with a small group of black people. They freely shared what they had been given, and were delighted when they saw the Spirit poured out on those from other races, especially whites. They felt that the Lord had given them the greatest gift, and they were thrilled that they were able to share it with their white brethren. That this great worldwide revival was a contribution from the black community has never been denied by white Pentecostals, but it is often forgotten.

Many of the white leaders who themselves went to Azusa Street to receive the baptism, remarkably still held to the prevalent segregationist beliefs of the times. They took the blessing back home to their all-white congregations in which no blacks were welcome. This was not true of all, but it was of most, and the entire Pentecostal Movement quickly developed into the white and black streams that still prevail today.

However, the separate black and white streams in this movement was not the way it began, and obviously was not the way that the Lord wanted it, but it is understandable. The spiritual battle that began to rage against the baptism in the Holy spirit itself was probably the most fierce persecution that Christians in this nation have ever experienced. Until the Charismatic renewal made speaking in tongues almost fashionable, the price for being a Pentecostal was very high. Caricatures of Pentecostals in newspapers across the country depicted them as anything from devil worshipers to lunatics. Employment was difficult, if not impossible, for anyone found to be Pentecostal. Their houses and their churches were often burned. The children of Pentecostals were ostracized, called "devil worshipers," and subjected to ruthless beatings by other children. Many had to flee from the homes and towns that they had grown up in.

Both the press and historians have turned a blind eye to this persecution against Pentecostals. It was, at times, as terrible and degrading as what African-Americans suffered under segregation. For black Pentecostals it was a double jeopardy, as they were secluded from the white culture because of their race, and then from the black culture because of their religion. Just as the first Reformers risked all that they had so that later generations could enjoy religious freedom, two generations of Pentecostals paid the price for our freedom to know the Holy Spirit in our churches the way that we do today. They did it because they loved the Holy Spirit, and they counted knowing Him and allowing Him freedom in the church as more important than any freedom that the world could give them.

Because of this intense persecution against Pentecostals, to add to this a battle with the powerful forces of segregation and bigotry, was understandably more than many felt they could handle at the time. Military history teaches that it will almost always result in defeat to try to fight a two-front war, so the battle against racism in the church would have to wait for another generation. Even so, the Pentecostal Movement began with those from every race, creed and social position, in unity, seeking the Lord together. The power that was released to impact the world has never been as great as it was in those first years at Azusa when this unity existed. It is apparent that the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement, and indeed the church, will never come into its full potential until this unity is permanent. His house will be "a house of prayer for all nations" (Greek ethnos, or literally "ethnic races").

From the first Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has proven that He will only come to the degree that we have unity. Like those who came to the Azusa Street Mission, we must want the Holy Spirit more than we want to hold on to our differences. Christianity was born as a multi-cultural entity, on the Day of Pentecost when men had gathered from "every nation." It was fitting that this is the way that the Holy Spirit came again at Azusa. In the little group at Antioch which sent our the first missionaries to the Gentiles, there was represented those from different races and social positions. When the Lord wants to do something truly great in the earth, this seems to be a dynamic that is required. In its most pure form the church will always be multicultural. That is why Paul had to resolutely confront Peter concerning his hypocrisy of not eating with the Gentiles. Racial equality before God is fundamental to the gospel.

It is debatable whether this multi-racial nature of the church was lost by the church because of her drift into apostasy, or whether it caused that drift. Regardless, it is the true state of the church that was born on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy spirit first came to the church, and we will only be the true church to the degree to which we recover it. This is being realized by many church leaders today, and overcoming racism is now rightly a major thrust almost across the spectrum of Christianity. This is certainly one of the most positive sign of our times.

Where the Spirit Is, There Is Liberty

There is another aspect to Seymour's remarkable leadership at Azusa. It was his ability to discern and trust the Holy Spirit's leadership, and give Him the freedom that He requires, if we will know His fullness. In spite of almost constant pressure from world-renowned church leaders, who came from around the globe to impose what they perceived to be needed order and direction on the revival, for over two years Seymour held the course and allowed the Holy Spirit to move in His own, often mysterious, ways. Like Evan Roberts, who was at the same time leading the great Welsh Revival, Seymour's greatest leadership quality was his ability to follow the Holy Spirit.

Seymour and Roberts both believed that the Holy Spirit required the freedom to move through whomever He chose, not just the leadership. They both resolved to allow anyone to be used by the Lord, even the most humble believers. This sometimes brought embarrassment, but more often it allowed the Holy Spirit to do marvelous things among them. If we really want the Holy Spirit in our midst, we must allow Him to be the leader. He is, after all, God.

God's Sovereignty Or The Free Will of Man

This has been one of the most ancient debates in the church. However, they are both true, and they are not in conflict with each other. Neither is either of these truths fifty percent of the truth. They are both one hundred percent true. God is utterly sovereign, and He has also, in His sovereignty, delegated authority to men that He will not even violate Himself.

Without freedom there could be no true worship or true obedience. That is why the Lord placed the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden. There could be no true obedience if there were not also the freedom to disobey. The Lord is the unquestioned Sovereign of the Universe, but when He delegates authority, He does not even violate it Himself. Otherwise we would never be able to rule and reign with Him. To rule requires both authority and responsibility. Therefore, even though He always knows what we need even before we ask Him, He always waits for us to ask.

For this reason, "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (II Corinthians 3:17). Liberty is required for true worship or true obedience. He has removed the veil into His presence for all, but we must seek Him. Therefore, we are all as close to God as we want to be. We are also as far from Him as we choose to be. If His manifest presence is not in our midst it is not because of Him, but because of our own choice. Many give lip service to wanting the Holy Spirit to lead their meetings, but really are not willing to give up their own programs, or trust Him in the way that He requires if He is to do this. Seymour was willing.

This kind of "hands off" leadership style has been a hallmark of most of the world's great revivals. However, even a cursory study of church history reveals that outside of revival it has seldom, if ever, worked. God simply moves in different ways at different times. In times of true revival there are usually dramatic and unique demonstrations of His sovereignty, and it is best to just stay out of His way. The rest of the time He seems to delight most in working with and through men. Even so, our goal should always be to submit our will to His, and always follow His leading. The more we can do this, the more He will usually manifest His wonderful presence.

As Vance Havner, one of the great revivalists of modern times, once observed, "Revival is like a sale at the department store. It is more dramatic, and gets more press, but the normal business of the store is the day to day merchandising of products." Revivals are likewise much more spectacular, but they are not the normal business of the church. Much more has been accomplished for the overall advancement of the gospel by the day to day witnessing of faithful saints, and by the service of faithful pastors of local churches, who day by day fight on the front lines of the battle against darkness, than has ever been accomplished by a revival.

Revivals have sparked great spiritual advances, but they are sustained only by the day to day devotion of the saints. This is likewise the story of the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement. Azusa was spectacular, as were other subsequent revivals and movements, but the real and substantial advance has come from a multitude of lesser known, but nevertheless faithful leaders and people.

The same is true in our personal lives. Spectacular spiritual experiences are wonderful, and can propel us to great heights of devotion and worship. Even so, the real strength of every Christian's life will usually be found in the degree of faithfulness to the disciplines of bible study, prayer, fellowship and day to day witnessing.

In times of revival, there is also a dynamic, manifest presence of the Holy Spirit that makes deviations apparent to almost everyone, including those who make them. Needed corrections are therefore usually automatic. However, when we do not have this dynamic presence of the Lord that is found in revival, almost every vacuum of leadership will be quickly filled with the immature, the prideful, or the rebellious. The result of this will not be revival, but confusion, or worse.

It is very important that we do not "get the cart in front of the horse," in the leadership we use. Seymour could use the leadership style that he did because he had revival. If he had tried to use this style with the same number and types of people without the dynamic of revival present, he would have had worse than chaos - he would have had war! This had happened to many who have tried to exhibit revival type leadership without revival. The key is to be ready to step aside when the presence of the Lord does come.

Our goal should be to have such a manifest presence of the Lord in all of our meetings. However, the way to do this is not to just sit back and do nothing until He comes, but to faithfully press on to maturity by seeking to increasingly be sensitive to His leading. Occasionally the Lord catches us up in a spectacular manifestation of His presence, but usually leads us to higher ground like a father teaching his child to walk. He will help us to stand, and then back off so that we must walk to Him. As we learn to take a couple of steps, He backs further away so that we have to walk further. He is not just playing with us when He removes His manifest presence, He is teaching us to walk in the Spirit and to pursue Him. When we do not feel Him it is not a time to sit down, but to try to take more steps.

The New Testament epistles are basically the apostles' exhortations to leaders who were serving in times that were not dynamic revivals. They did not expect the spirit to come every day like He did on the Day of Pentecost, so they went about doing the day to day work of the ministry. However, when He does decide to come in a dramatic way that ignites a revival, it's time to drop what we're doing and ride the wave for as far as it will take us.

Wisdom is to know when the Lord is telling us to go forth and take the land, or when He is telling us to stand and watch His salvation. There are times for each, and anytime we confuse them we will have problems. Seymour was called to lead in a revival. for a few years he exemplified the wisdom to just stay in prayer and let the Lord do the leading (he actually kept his head in a box during the meetings so that his prayer would not be distracted by all that was going on). However, the fierce persecution raised up against the movement soon pressured him into an increasingly protectionist stature. Gradually he allowed more and more control of the meetings to be taken over by a few leaders. Soon they were following a program for the meetings. Those who were witnesses said that just as gradually as this happened the Holy Spirit seemed to depart.

This explanation of how the revival at Azusa Street ended could be the case. However, it is also possible that it was simply time to move on, and that the Spirit was withdrawing His presence so that the people would go forth. Just as the sale at a department store would lose its impact if it went on all of the time, it does not seem that the Lord ever intended for revivals to last forever in their initial form.

Even so, most revivals do end prematurely, or in a way that was not preferable, because of human mistakes. We should learn from there, but let us also not fall into the trap of wrongly worshiping revival. We can be as close to the Lord today as anyone ever has been, even in the midst of the greatest revivals.

Without question, the Azusa Street revival was one of the greatest in all of church history. It can be argued that it has not yet ended, but has gone on in many different forms, and in many different places. It is right for us to give honor to whom honor is due, and William J. Seymour must be considered one of the greatest Christian leaders of all time.

The Greatest Miracle

At the height of the Azusa Street revival Seymour prophesied, "We are on the verge of the greatest miracle the world has ever seen." The miracle he was referring to was a true love and unity between races and creeds that he considered to be fundamental Christianity. He did not live to see the completion of his dream, but he fully expected the renewal to ultimately accomplish it. As the movement has continued in a number of different forms, it is still more than possible, it is probable that his dream will come true. When it does, William J. Seymour must be considered as one who sowed the seeds for this greatest miracle of all. Possibly more than any other man in church history, he promoted that which alone can bring it to pass, seeking the fullness of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

Above all things the Holy Spirit has come to testify of Jesus. He alone can truly convict us of our sins and lead us into all truth. When the Holy Spirit does manifest Himself in our midst, we do not see the world in shades of black and white; we only see the glory of the Son of God. He has been given to us to help us see as God sees. God does not look on the outward appearance, but on the heart. God does not just see us as we are now, but He sees us through the blood of His Son, which is to see us as we are to become - made in the likeness of Jesus. We must begin to see each other the same way.

Paul the apostle had said that "tongues are for a sign" (I Corinthians 14:22), and that sign seemed to have been given on the first Day of Pentecost. That day men from every nation heard the glories of God in their own language. This was the first time since the Tower of Babel and the scattering of men's languages that this had happened. The sign was that the church would be the anti-thesis of the Tower of Babel, where men were scattered from each other. In the church, we will all be regathered as one.

Even as fractured and divided as the Pentecostal Movement may presently be, it has the destiny and calling to help bring unity to the whole church. The fire still burns in the Pentecostal Movement. The fire will burn until all of the wood, hay and stubble has been consumed, and the gold, silver and precious stones have been purified. Each movement may be fashioned into a different stone, but the day is coming when we will all be fashioned together into one crown of glory.

The explosive spread of the movement begun at Azusa continued as long as the Holy Spirit was free to move as He willed, and the people sat before Him as one. As the revival drifted from these basics, they also drifted from the source of their power. Where the Spirit is Lord there must be liberty, and where He is Lord there will be unity. Before the Lord we all look the same. The blood of Jesus does wash away all color lines.

It is interesting to note that the very name Azusa was derived from an Indian word that means "blessed miracle." This was first noted by Father Juan Crespi in 1769, while on the Portola expedition to explore California. At that time Azusa referred to the site of an old Indian village south of present day Los Angeles in the San Gabriel canyon. There a young Indian girl named Coma Lee used to pray and fast for the healing of her people. She was gifted with healing power

as she laid hands on the sick. After she prayed for a chief who was wonderfully healed, he gave her the name Azusa to commemorate his miracle of healing. For many years., Azusa continue her healing ministry while her fame spread all over southern California. During that time whenever there was suffering, people said, "Go to Azusa and be healed...go to Azusa." Maybe it is time for us to again go to Azusa and be healed of the many wounds that we have inflicted upon one another.