

MY PENTECOST



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Cover illustration © xochicalco/istock/thinkstock

Cover design by Andrew Dragos

Page design by Andrew Dragos

PDF ISBN: 978-1-62824-215-7

SEEDBED PUBLISHING
Sowing for a Great Awakening
204 N. Lexington Avenue
Wilmore, Kentucky 40390



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My Pentecost

I had a very bright Christian experience, for several years after my conversion, and had I met with sanctified people, or heard the doctrine of perfect love preached, I am confident I would have sought the experience without hesitation.

I deeply regret that I did not at this period in my Christian life hear some such men as Dr. Godbey, Dr. Carradine, or Bro. Robinson preach this blessed truth. As time passed my zeal somewhat abated, and I frequently fell into sin, but repented so soon as I became conscious of my wrong-doings, and would not cease to pray until restored to the favor of the Lord.

The community in which I spent my boyhood was made up of God-fearing people, and my most intimate associates were Christians. I was regular in

attendance at Sabbath school and preaching, read the Scriptures with delight, and was often in secret prayer. Immediately after my conversion I took an active part in revival work, going in to the audience to seek souls, instructing penitents at the altar, and praying often in public. I also erected an altar of prayer in the home of my grandfather, where I lived and conducted worship night and morning.

Notwithstanding all this I had a quick temper and often became angry. I also frequently indulged in levity to such excess that I suffered sorrow and shame in my heart, weeping and praying for forgiveness and grace to control both my evil temper and my disposition to levity, but made poor headway.

All this time I felt clearly impressed that I must preach the gospel, and about six years after my conversion was licensed to preach, and commenced at once, when opportunity offered, to proclaim the word of life. The Lord set his seal to my ministry from the first, and I soon saw souls converted.

About the time I was licensed to preach Rev. George O. Barnes came to Kentucky and attracted much attention preaching the "Higher Life."

He was one of the most interesting speakers I ever heard—a man of superior education and refine-

ment, wide travel, and varied experiences. He was graceful in manner and saintly in appearance. His face seemed to have the light of heaven in it, and his voice was mellow and musical with a love that won the multitudes to admire and love him.

His doctrines were a strange mixture of free grace, predestination, final perseverance, the higher life, and Universalism.

“God is love and nothing else” was his motto. Thousands of people in the church and out of it, made a profession of faith in Christ under his ministry. There seemed to be no conviction for sin, no repentance, no reformation, no regeneration, no baptisms, no joining of the churches, nothing but a passionate love for “Bro. Barnes and a profession of faith in Christ.” Mixed up with his other teachings was the doctrine of the “Higher Life,” or sanctification. Many people got deeply interested in this phase of his teachings, and I heard much of a life without sinning, of abiding peace and rest with perfect resignation and constant joy. Having been soundly converted and very well established in the first principles of Methodist doctrine, I rejected Bro. Barnes, and all of his teachings together.

Widespread apostasy followed his revivals. It seemed that his seed fell upon stony ground, sprung up at once, but perished for want of root. All of this strongly prejudiced me against the doctrine of sanctification. Looking back, I believe that Bro. Barnes was a pure man, enjoying the experience of perfect love, and I have no doubt quite a number of persons in Kentucky were led out into the experience of full salvation under his ministry, and are abiding in this experience to this day. But at the time I was prejudiced against the doctrine, by whatever name called, and while I frequently met with those in the experience, and delighted to hear them sing, or pray, or speak, yet I somehow got into my head the notion that they claimed that they had reached a place in the religious life where they could not be tempted, could not commit sin, and had reached a point of such absolute perfection that it was impossible for them to grow in grace.

I had gotten the idea of purity and maturity badly mixed in my mind, and had false and exaggerated notions of maturity. I thought that those who professed sanctification, professed maturity, a maturity beyond which there could be no advancement, and from which there could be no fall. I think

Mr. Barnes almost taught this; at least at the time I thought this was his teaching, and rejected it, not without indignation.

The war had closed. The excitement and strife of readjustment was over. The real estate craze in which many cities had been built on paper, had swept over the South, leaving many old fields laid off in lots, and foundries, and factories half built, to rust and fall into decay, and at last after a quarter of a century of excitement and unrest, there came a lull, and the people had time to read, and think, and pray. Wesley's sermons were brought down from garrets. Here and there a copy of "Hester Ann Rogers," or the "Plain Account," was brought out from some old box or shelf, and read with wonder and delight. The revival fires and the modern holiness movement were being kindled in Georgia, Kentucky, and other states in the South. One would frequently hear mentioned the connection with the subject of entire sanctification, the names of Dr. Lovick Pierce, Rev. W. B. Godbey, Rev. B. A. Cundiff, and Rev. W. A. Dodge.

Rev. W. S. Grinstead, of the Kentucky Conference, and Rev. J. S. Keen, of the Louisville Conference, professed entire sanctification, received instantaneously by faith. I loved and revered these good men,

but I felt there was a mistake somewhere. The whole matter of the remains of sin, or the carnal mind and its crucifixion, seemed strange and intangible to me. I could not understand or get a hold of it.

I had just come home from Vanderbilt University, where I had spent one school year. I loved Christ and longed for souls, and had the revival spirit. The brethren called me in every direction. The Lord gave us revivals everywhere. I was stationed in the Eleventh Street M. E. Church, South, and Covington, Kentucky. The church prospered, and I went out to help the brethren in meetings. Great revivals followed in quick succession in Lexington, Winchester, and Paris. No church could hold the congregations. Hundreds of dollars were thrust into my hands, a handsome gold watch was presented to me by young converts, and it seemed to me that I was in no need of a "second blessing." All I seemed to need was a church large enough to hold my congregations and altar room for the scores of penitents who everywhere hastened to the altars for prayer. Although I was a happy man, on looking back I now see that there was a shallowness in my spiritual life, and much in my thoughts and desires, which was very inconsistent, and would have cut me off from the Lord altogether

but for his amazing mercy and long suffering. There are always flatterers for every public speaker. Some speak indiscreetly out of real love and admiration. Others will praise you to your face and criticize you at your back. I had my share of both of these varieties and was hurt in my spiritual life by them.

I believed myself to be perfectly sincere. If I had ambition, and I had, it was not for office in the church, or rulership over men. I loved men, and desired to save them, and have their friendship and love; but I had no desire to rule them. My ambition soared far above such offices as that of Presiding Elder or Bishop. These things looked small to me. To be a mighty preacher of the Word was my desire. There was far more selfishness in these desires of mine than I knew of at the time, and I was startled and surprised when all the depth of my heart was laid open to me. About this time I was much in company with Rev. Horace Cockrill. He was a thoughtful, serious, honest man. He would ofttime rebuke me for my disposition to levity, and I loved him for it. He was seeking after perfect love, had much to say of John Wesley, the "Plain Account of Christian Perfection," and frequently warned and exhorted me.

I would say, “Cockrill, I had a powerful conversion; I live a happy life, and God gives me souls all the time. I am not all that I ought to be, and must be, but I am growing in grace, and will come to the perfect man in due time.” And truly I did love the Lord Jesus. I loved the poor and outcast. I could work and pray for the salvation for the most unworthy and sinful. I had no feeling of hatred, envy, or jealousy toward anyone. I believed myself to be one of the happiest men walking the earth.

But at that very time there were secret thoughts and imaginations hidden away in my heart, which I should have blushed with shame to have my intimate friend know. And although I think I went for many months, possibly years, without bitter anger, I had lurking in me a volcano of evil temper, which would leap into a consuming flame in a moment, if I thought anyone proposed to trample upon what I thought were sacred personal rights. I cannot say that I was free from occasional actual sin. Often I had occasion to repent, and weep, and pray, for the restoration of the peace of justification. Not that I was guilty of any gross sins, but there were lapses, and inconsistencies. When I would do good, evil was present with me. I delighted in the law of God

after the inward man (the new man, the regenerated man); but I found another law in my members warring against the law of my mind.

My heart was in my work but there was uncleanness in my heart. While the regenerating grace of God enabled me to hold under and restrain the evil that lurked within; the seeds of it were there, and could only be kept from springing into rank and ruinous growth by watchfulness and prayer.

Human nature shrinks from admitting that the pen-picture of man's moral pollution, drawn by an inspired hand in Galatians 5:19–21, is a true representation of the inner life, but in these searching words the Holy Ghost makes no mistake. To be sure the things described in the Scriptures referred to, do not reign in the regenerate, but the seed of them do remain.

Bro. Cockrill wrote me that he had received entire sanctification, that it was just as distinct as his regeneration, and that it had brought him an abiding peace and joy that he had never known before. This deeply interested, and I must say, troubled me. I had no doubt Cockrill had been blessed. I reasoned that up to this time he had been merely a church member, that he had reformed his outward life and had been

a seeker, and now he had been converted, or that he had unconsciously lost the Spirit and drifted away from God, and he had now been reclaimed, and thought he had received something new, when really it was the restoration of a lost salvation, or the clear witness of his acceptance. Meanwhile Bro. Cockrill and myself were corresponding, and I was coming to believe that he had received something I did not possess, and there was coming into my heart the feeling and resolution, "If Cockrill has it, it is for me, and I must have it too."

Long my heart had hungered and thirsted after righteousness, and many times I had wrestled with the Lord in prayer for something, I knew not what. Now my desires and prayers were beginning to take definite shape.

I was at this time stationed in The Highlands, just across the river from Cincinnati, back of Newport. Rev. J. H. Young was assisting me in a meeting in my church. My heart was greatly drawn out in prayer, both for my people and for myself. At the church, in my room, in the orchard, and on the river cliffs, I was pouring out my heart to God for a blessing on my soul, and a revival in my church. I had a sweet sense of acceptance and peace in my heart.

One day during the meeting Dr. Young and myself went to Bro. William Southgate's to dinner. Bro. Southgate came in from Newport just before dinner and handed me a letter. It was from Bro. Cockrill. I supposed he was writing on his favorite theme, one in which I was becoming deeply interested. I excused myself, and going out in to the hall read the letter. As I read it the scales fell from my eyes. My mind grasped the doctrine of instantaneous sanctification. I saw it was for me, and wept for joy.

It seemed that a conversation, like the following, went on in my breast: "I know I am God's child, but I am not a holy child, but he wants me to be holy, and I cannot make myself so, but he can make me holy, and he will." The whole matter seemed clear to me as a sunburst. I longed to hasten to the place where I was boarding, and prostrate myself at the feet of Jesus and say to him, Sanctify me wholly. I had no doubt of his doing it.

After dinner I excused myself, and leaving Dr. Young and Bro. Southgate, started for home.

I stopped at five different houses along the avenue and had prayer with the inmates, and at each place we had a melting time.

When I reached home my heart was in a gracious state, and I hurried to my room expecting to be sanctified. I had no thought of doubt about the matter.

“It is God’s will; it is his work; now is the time, and my whole heart desires it; it will now be done.” This was my thought as I ran up the steps to my room.

When I opened the door Dr. Young was sitting in my room; he had passed down the avenue while I was praying with some family, and had come in ahead of me. I was disappointed on seeing him, for it was my desire to be alone with Jesus.

I sat down upon a divan, and Dr. Young said: “Morrison, I think I had as well go home; we are not going to have a revival here.”

“No, no,” I said, “you must not think of it. I have visited and prayed with five families since dinner, and they were in tears. The Lord is at work graciously, and the meeting must go on. Dr. Young, the power of God is all over this hill,” and throwing up my hands I said, “Doctor, I feel the power of God here in this room right now.”

At that instant the Holy Ghost fell upon me. I fell over on the divan utterly helpless. It seemed as if a great hand had taken hold upon my heart, and was pulling it out of my body. Dr. Young ran across the

room and caught me in his arms, and called aloud, but I could not answer. Several moments must have passed, when it seemed to me as if a ball of fire fell on my face, the sensation at my heart ceased, and I cried out, "Glory to God!" Dr. Young dropped me, and I walked the floor feeling as light as a feather.

The Doctor said, "Morrison, what do you mean? You frightened me fearfully. I thought you were dying."

"It was the Lord working with me," I answered. I had received my Pentecost.

It was without doubt the Baptism with the Holy Ghost, and I felt my heart was cleansed from all sin. I had a strong impression to tell Dr. Young and Bro. Taliaferro's family, where I was boarding, what had occurred, but something suggested that "you should not profess but live holiness."

"Say nothing about it, but live such a consistent devout life that you will impress people that you are filled with the Spirit."

I was untaught with regard to the experience, having read but little on the subject, had only heard one sermon on the subject, and did not understand that one. I determined to go forward, living devout and true, but saying nothing of what had occurred.

It was the mistake of my life. It was ignorance on my part, but I paid dearly for it.

Within three months the new power which had come into my life had all gradually leaked out, and I became painfully conscious of a great loss. After some seeking and neglecting I finally set myself to recover what I had lost or to die in the attempt.

I ate but little for fifteen days and nights, but fasted and called on the Lord. I shall not undertake to detail to the reader here what I passed through, of darkness, doubt, and discouragement. The Lord tried me, and found the evil way in me. Satan tempted me sorely, and I was tossed about between many hopes and fears. In my struggle I fainted three times one day (a thing which never occurred to me before or since) and the friends had a doctor with me. No one knew aught of the conflict which was passing in my breast. I was at the time pastor of the M. E. Church South, in Danville, Kentucky. I was willing to surrender all, to suffer anything, but I felt that to profess entire sanctification was improper and a great mistake. I had no teaching.

The doctor pronounced my trouble nervous prostration and prescribed this and that. I kept my secret and struggled on. The Spirit gave me a view of the

corruption of the human heart, and a conception of the wickedness of sin I had never had before. He gave me a view of all my past life, and a glimpse into the future which made my soul to shudder, and God forbid I should forget.

One morning, while on my knees reading the letter to the Laodicean Church, just as I came to these words: "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." The Spirit came back in sanctifying power. I leaped and shouted aloud for joy, and picked up my hat and hastened to tell a friend of my victory, but made up my mind on the way that I must not profess sanctification.

I went out and talk to my friend, told him "I had received a great blessing." While we talked the joy subsided.

I was at a great loss to know the cause. I now understand perfectly why it was.

I should have professed the experience clearly and boldly, and let the Lord take care of the consequences. But in my ignorance I thought it would greatly offend the people, destroy my influence, and hurt the work of the church.

It was not fear that hindered me, but want of knowledge. I have wished a thousand times since

that I had had a teacher to tell me what to do. My experience and observation is that those who do not testify soon lose the experience of full salvation.

I soon realized that I had suffered loss, that my experience was not satisfactory. I lived a much higher life in every regard than prior to this time, read the Scriptures, prayed much, and preached with greater earnestness. The Lord gave me fruit, and at times I was in a state of peace and joy, but my experience was vacillating.

Meanwhile the holiness movement was making headway, and I attended several conventions, fully believed the doctrine, and went to the altar many times, and was in this way a seeker for about three years. I passed through some great trials, and some sore temptations. There was a demand for my services. I was stationed at the state capital; associated with the other pastors of the city as Chaplain in the Legislature and Senate, came in touch with lawyers, statesmen, and great preachers, so-called at least. Camp meetings and city churches called for my help in revival work, and much was said to me about the pastorate of some of the largest churches of my denomination. A large and wealthy church of another conference selected me for their pastor, and

sent a young lawyer, with whom I had been intimate when a student at Vanderbilt, to ask me to come and take charge. The Bishop consented to appoint me to the work, and thus my mind was diverted with many things.

Ambition clothed itself in the deceitful robe of promises of great usefulness, and so I was tossed about.

“I can see far down the valley
Where I wandered many years.
Often hindered in my journey
By the ghosts of doubts and fears.”

I entered the evangelistic work, and commenced the publishing of a holiness paper, with my mind fully made up to devote my life to the spread of the doctrine of full salvation.

I was a seeker, and urged others to seek for instantaneous sanctification. Some were wholly sanctified in almost every meeting I held. I rejoiced with them and pressed on.

At times it seemed as if I could reach out and grasp “perfect love,” and again it seemed far away.

Something more than three years had passed since the loss of my experience at Danville because of a failure to testify. I was now fully awake to the importance of testimony and willing to speak, if only my heart could again feel the full assurance of perfect love. I was conducting a meeting in a large city church. A number of souls were entering into Canaan. There was great peace in my own heart. A delighted calm settled upon my spiritual being. I searched for sin and found none. All appeared white within. There was no ecstasy, but a sense of purity. With this feeling I arose one morning and said, "I want to testify that the blood of Christ sanctifies my heart from all sin." Immediately, even before all of these words were out of my mouth, my cup ran over, and I rejoiced and praised God that the abiding comforts had returned. From that day to this I have not failed to give my testimony to full salvation.

My heart has warmed today as I have written these lines, and I take fresh courage to press forward in the highway of holiness.

Outside of the all-atoning blood of Christ I have no hope, but through its precious merit I claim for myself, and preach to others, full salvation.

Something more than a decade of years have passed away since I was enabled to proclaim the great transaction done, and by his grace I feel that I am rooted and grounded in this precious truth. There is much more for my soul, a greater depth of love and joy, much land yet to be explored and possessed.

Looking backward I see many mistakes and shortcomings, but the past is under the blood.

I shall always deeply regret that I did not testify fully when I first received the cleansing.

Had good John Bunyan never passed through a deep soul struggle, he could not have written "The Pilgrim's Progress." My conflict was a long and bitter one, but I came forth with some lessons I could not have learned in any other school. These lessons have been invaluable to me in teaching others the importance of a clear testimony to entire sanctification. My only boast is in Jesus Christ. I have found him mighty to save to the uttermost, and to keep in perfect peace.

The desire of my heart is more of his love, the one central thought, and purpose of my life is to proclaim salvation full and free, for all men, from all sin, by simple faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. Amen.



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