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**Pentecostal movement, worship, faith, signs and wonders movements,
spiritual warfare**

It should surprise no one that I confess I feel more than a little overwhelmed with the magnitude of the task set before me by the organizers of this IAF conference. To present anything thoughtful and meaningful on this vast subject in the scope of little more than twenty minutes is far too much to ask of me. Nevertheless, I appreciate the honor accorded me in the invitation, if not the audacity, and I shall endeavor to give all of you something to ponder which, hopefully, may generate useful conversation on these subjects. Unfortunately, I cannot cover all the issues mentioned in the title in the scope of this presentation.

It would seem wise to divide the subject matter before us into several categories at the outset and then with some broad strokes I will seek to do at least a measure of justice to the importance of these issues. 1) First, I will try to define in the biblical context the subject matter to be dealt with, so that at least you will understand my use of the terms appearing in this brief document. 2) Then I will seek to present a broad overview of the church's history in relation to our subject matter. I will include some personal references for the sake of illustration, but cannot elaborate extensively. 3) Some thoughts concerning guidelines may be helpful in order to avoid errors and pitfalls. 4) Finally, I will suggest some conclusions and topics which we could look into at greater length if the time is available.

THE MEANING OF PENTECOST

It is obvious that the Lord Jesus himself provided significant anticipation for the pentecostal event that was to occur following his resurrection and ascension into heaven. Even John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would baptize his disciples with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Mt 3:11). Jesus indicated that his disciples would have to await the coming of the Holy Spirit to be filled to overflowing with grace, wisdom, boldness and spiritual authority in order to fulfill their responsibilities in the spread of the gospel and the kingdom of God (Jn 7:38–39; 16:7–15; 20:21–23; Lk 24:45–49; Acts 1:7–8). Much that Jesus said to them in this respect would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to understand, prior to the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

I will not try to recount in detail the sequence of events which the disciples experienced on the day of Pentecost, since I am confident that they are quite familiar to all who are present. However, I think it might be useful to underscore some of the more important facts

accompanying that magnificent occurrence which indelibly marked the disciples and set the course for the rather rapid expansion of the gospel in the world. The following characteristics come quickly to mind:

- The entire group of 120 waiting disciples had the same experience with the Holy Spirit. None were excluded.

- The initial evidence was a mighty wind from heaven which filled the room where the disciples were meeting.

- Then there were tongues of fire that came from above and rested on every one of them.

- All were filled with the Holy Spirit and spontaneously articulated a large variety of tongues (glossolalia), which were subsequently understood by the multitude from many nations that gathered in the street. Luke tells us that those in the street heard the disciples proclaiming in their native tongues the wonders of God.

- Luke also tells us that all this caused a great noise and stir which resulted in thousands of Jews (who had come to Jerusalem for the annual feast of Pentecost) to gather in the street. The event left them confused and perplexed, since they found no explanation for what was happening. Some considered in passing that it was simply a drunken mob in the upper room. All this would seem to imply exhilaration, and perhaps even wild enthusiasm, which the 120 disciples were experiencing.

- Peter, having overcome his shame and cowardice, now filled with the Spirit, gave to the multitude the spiritual explanation for what was transpiring: Jesus Christ had been raised from the dead, ascended to heaven, seated on God's throne, and had now poured out the Holy Spirit as promised upon his disciples. He used the occasion to challenge the multitude to acknowledge their error in dismissing Jesus as the Messiah and demanding his crucifixion; they must now repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Luke tells us that some three thousand people responded in faith, to whom Peter promised the same experience which the 120 had just had.

- Then Luke gives us at the end of Acts chapter 2 a brief description of the characteristics of the new community of followers of Christ in Jerusalem: They were baptized, followed faithfully the apostles' teaching, shared in fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayer. All were amazed at the many signs and wonders done by the apostles and were moved to express profound generosity as they cared for the needs of others in the fellowship. They met every day in the temple and in the homes of the disciples, praising God and enjoying the esteem of the general populace. Luke adds that the Lord continued to save and add to their number other believers on a daily basis.

In the minds of a majority of pentecostal believers today, most of these characteristics continue to be embraced, at least in their faith, whether or not in their practice. But for the most part, the more significant evidences of pentecostal faith and practice would include: a life changing experience with the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion to Christ, a personal experience of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially glossolalia (praying or worshiping in tongues), faith in God's intervention for physical healing, a joyful experience of worship and praise and, in many cases,

faith to expel evil spirits or demons (Mk 16:17). Beyond varied personal experiences, the pentecostal believer has a great desire to know the will of God and to be personally led by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is not simply a powerful influence, he is the third person of the holy Trinity, revealing Jesus Christ and leading the church in victory and expansion.

AN OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY

A careful study of church history reveals that pentecostal and charismatic manifestations have never completely ceased, although there is little evidence of them over extended periods of spiritual dearth. The early church fathers and writers made reference to them in various instances, especially over the first three centuries of the Christian era. Once Christianity was acknowledged as the “official” religion of the Roman empire, much spontaneous spiritual activity gave place to predetermined liturgy in Christian worship. With the fall of the Roman empire and the onset of the “Dark ages” we find little testimony to vital spirituality outside the mainstream, with few exceptions, until the early efforts toward reformation, which finally culminated in the sixteenth century reformation under Martin Luther and others.

With the rise of John Wesley, initially an Anglican priest and missionary to the American colonies, there came a significant spiritual awakening, often with spontaneous outbursts, which might be considered a precursor to the modern pentecostal movement. Certainly there was increased emphasis on holiness in the Christian life and eventually, at the beginning of the 20th century, the modern pentecostal movement was born in the context of a Bible school sponsored by a “holiness” group in Topeka, Kansas, under the direction of Charles Parham. His later influence on William J. Seymour in meetings near Houston, Texas and Seymour’s subsequent move to the Los Angeles area gave rise to the Azusa Street Mission (1906–09), from which the pentecostal message and mission spread rapidly throughout the world.

Because the early pentecostals were largely rejected by the mainstream Christian denominations, they did not enjoy wide acceptance until after the middle of the 20th century. Then in 1960 news of a pentecostal outpouring among Episcopalians (Anglicans) in Van Nuys, California, under rector Dennis Bennet, emerged at the national level (in the USA) and quickly caught the attention of others in the more traditional mainline churches. This eventually gave rise to what has since become known as the charismatic awakening, quickly spreading to most Christian denominations, including the Roman Catholics from about 1967.

Admittedly, many of these events are reported from the viewpoint of American writers and journalists. It would be both interesting and quite helpful if the information were filled out with reports of related events in other parts of the world. However, the brevity of this document makes that next to impossible at this writing.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

During my studies in a Baptist university I was exposed to others who told me of their experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Since I had an intense desire to know the Lord deeply, I responded in faith and visited Pentecostal churches from time to time in the course of my search. When some time later I met the young lady who is my wife we shared with each

other our search for deeper meaning in our walk with God. She too had been favorably influenced during her university studies by a pentecostal professor. Shortly after our marriage we both experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit in March, 1953. The experience deeply marked our lives and served to initiate a life-long commitment to Christian service and missions, eventually leading us to serve the Lord in Latin America.

The challenges we faced undoubtedly brought about a growth in our faith and in sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Over the years, in a variety of contexts, we have seen his gracious intervention in signs and wonders, in deliverance of others under demonic influence, in healings and in a variety of charismatic gifts. Our hearts are full of praise and gratitude to the Lord for his abundant grace and kindness toward us over many years and in many different places. To God be all the glory!

GUIDELINES AND DISCERNMENT

Walking with the Lord under the guidance of the Holy Spirit could be aptly described as a continual, great adventure. The Scriptures set forth for us very important guidelines, but there is no substitute for tuning our ears and our hearts to the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures often tell us what we are to do and many things we are not to do, but only the Holy Spirit can tell us when and where to act. And just as important as learning to follow the Holy Spirit is our need to learn to stop when he says "Stop". The Lord will bring into our lives certain persons, or he will teach us through very difficult circumstances, and he will open or close doors before us, but without sensitivity to his touch or his guidance, we can easily miss the lessons he wants to teach us. We must discipline ourselves to become faithful and diligent students of the Scriptures, while keeping our inner ear attentive to his voice.

Over the years we have seen too many go astray, some with misplaced enthusiasm, some with little discernment, some because they were unwilling to listen to wise counsel, some because they were deeply convinced that the Lord had shown them something very personal and they were unwilling to open their plans to others who could help them avoid pitfalls, and many have dropped out because of discouragement. Some have fallen into traps set by the enemy of our souls and others have succumbed to their own ambition.

I will mention a few guidelines that I have found very useful in my walk with the Lord, in the hope that they might be useful to others as well.

1) Nothing can take the place of the Scriptures and an abiding commitment to honor God and his revelation to us therein. We must study the Scriptures, know them deeply and always keep our hearts open to the Holy Spirit to enlighten us further. But we must keep in mind that the Lord is not going to lead us in a way that is contrary to the clear teaching of the Bible. To do so, we need to appreciate the importance of sound hermeneutics, faithful study and meditation and a commitment to the historic foundational truths which the church has embraced over the centuries.

2) We need to walk closely with others. It is dangerous to stand alone, and it is not advisable to make decisions without consulting with others who care for us and with those who will be affected by our decisions.

3) We should always be prepared to filter everything we feel we have received by revelation or inspiration. Never act on inspiration alone. Check it out with those who can help evaluate it.

4) We should understand the importance of continuity. God is not doing something novel every day. He is a God of purpose and always works according to plan. Even when he introduces surprises, they should be seen as part of his overall purpose in our lives.

5) Our supreme purpose is to be more like Jesus every day and in every way. We should not see our work as simply project-oriented. God is working in us to make us more like him. If this does not become evident in the course of our walk, something is amiss.

6) The Holy Spirit wants to lead us and make our lives meaningful. Let us develop a hearing heart, a willingness to walk in his ways, a readiness to lay aside our personal plans in response to him.

FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

Finally, I would like to suggest some areas for further consideration. Some of the tendencies I see in pentecostal and charismatic circles disturb me. I see too much arrogance, too much desire to be in prominence, too little humility, too little willingness to let the Lord alone be glorified. I wonder also how effective we can be if we do not learn to listen quietly to the Lord. It seems to me we have almost lost the art of contemplation and meditation. We concentrate on action, but I wonder whether we should not concentrate more on thinking, weighing, evaluating. And it troubles me that many who believe they have received an inspiration or instruction from the Lord are unwilling to test or filter that revelation before imposing it on others. These are some of the concerns I address in the suggestions that follow.

1) We need, I believe, a renewed appreciation of silence. The discipline of silence is something every servant of God needs to learn. We do not need to give our opinion on everything that comes up in a conversation. We should cultivate a willingness to withhold judgment until we have had time to think carefully about things and tune our hearts to listen to the Lord.

We need to train the saints who are under our responsibility in the art of waiting upon God, listening carefully before acting. Over the years the church has taught much about speaking properly and with eloquence, but little has been taught the saints about learning to listen. Many assume that only the pastors and church leaders are responsible to listen to God, but that is the birthright of every Christian (John 10:27; Romans 8:14). This is not something that is learned quickly or easily; pastors should diligently teach their flock to learn to know the ways in which the Lord leads his own.

2) We need to give more attention to the Holy Spirit's working in our lives in gifts, operations and revelation, especially in the context of evangelism and missions. Here again, too much is left with church leaders and those on the platform. The church would be greatly enriched if all the saints understood that the Holy Spirit has distributed his gifts among all the saints, and all are responsible to be sensitive to him. We need to teach our congregations more concerning perception, discernment, operation and development of spiritual gifts and graces.

These gifts do not appear in our lives fully developed and perfected; spiritual skills are learned and sharpened through use and through interaction with others. We should incorporate into many of our meetings opportunities for the saints to learn and get experience in the charismatic gifts. And we should help the saints to learn how to respond to the Spirit's guidance in contexts outside the church meetings.

3) There seems to be an unwritten assumption in many Christians that whoever has a spiritual gift can operate without questioning. Many prophesy, but no one judges the word. Someone receives a revelation and acts upon it without checking with others whether he is truly led by the Lord. Those who pray for the sick often assume that healing takes place, whether it does or not. Would it not be much wiser for us to submit our inspiration to our peers for their evaluation? We sometimes act as if we were a law unto ourselves. Brothers, this needs to be corrected! To many outside the church we appear to be arrogant, self-propelled and presumptive, unwilling to accept the judgment of others.

I think it would be helpful to the church and to all of us who are ministers to take a lower and more humble profile in this respect. The apostle Paul insisted that when the prophets speak, other [prophets-?] should judge (1 Corinthians 14:29–33). That seems to indicate that the prophet's word should not be taken as authority until it is properly judged. He also wrote that we should not restrict the Holy Spirit nor should we despise prophecy, but that all should be submitted for evaluation and only that which is good should be retained (1 Thessalonians 5:19). He laid down restrictions on the use of tongues in the assembly (1 Corinthians 14), but to many pentecostal believers, speaking out in tongues has become a sign of their legitimacy as pentecostals. These issues need to be faced and dealt with properly. I know too many pastors who refuse to handle these matters in a critical way or to teach the saints according to the Scriptures. I think we would do well and perhaps establish a healthy precedent if we would lay down some wisely considered guidelines for such matters in our meetings.

4) We need to make it clear that we have no interest in being a one-man orchestra. Not only in such forums as this conference, but also in our regular activities, it should be evident to all who know us that we are not acting alone. We should cease to be concerned about our prominence and dominance, and be more concerned that Jesus Christ be seen as Lord and Head of the church. This will never be the case unless we learn to act in concert. If peers are lacking, then we need to concentrate on raising up and training others to stand with us and even to take our place. None of us dare try to perpetuate himself. We must decrease, he must increase!

Jesus Christ was insistent on this point. He called twelve to be apostles and dealt with them together, sometimes in smaller groups, but always in a plural setting. The early church in Jerusalem presented their plural leadership as united, cooperative, complementary, even self-effacing. The apostle Paul almost never traveled or ministered alone; he always had colleagues and understudies. The church is a body and all members are important and essential to each other. We need to set an example with our own leadership style that all ministry is complementary, not a one-man spectacle, even where there are outstanding gifts and eloquence.

CONCLUSION

I conclude this brief study by complimenting you on the excellent criteria that are evident in the leadership of this annual gathering. I encourage you to continue standing together, in the face of all odds. Your work is very important at this juncture in the church's history and experience. Too many wrong impressions are being given by those who call themselves apostles but are seriously questioned and are even doing much damage to the church. Some of these cases I know firsthand; others have been made known to me by those who have been negatively affected. We have a great challenge to be authentic, spiritual, diligent and serious, without assuming preposterous claims that have no place in those who desire to honor Christ. May the Lord continue to guide your thoughts and your decisions.

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