

Likewise, your decision to follow Christ is not what turns His salvation on; He has already given you the gift of His salvation. That's what John 3:16 is saying; it is your unbelief that turns the gift off. The message that was "sent" to us in 1888 is better Good News than we have been in the habit of thinking. Our salvation is 100% due to God's initiative, not to our own in any way. But we let Him save us; by repentance, we stop turning the switch off! "The blessings of salvation are for every soul. Nothing but his own choice can prevent any man from becoming a partaker of the promise in Christ by the gospel" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 403).

PENTECOST A SELF-PROPAGATING GOSPEL

By Paul Penno Jr.
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Is there a self-propagating gospel? We work hard, energetically to proclaim the gospel. But is there a yet-untried method of soul-winning? Not merely by pushing electronic buttons, but that has such a built-in power pack that common people who believe the message can watch conversions take place?

If you attend church, you've heard the pleas: "Do more, work harder, win souls! Look how the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons go door to door; why don't we do more?"

In North America, the cost of each baptism is estimated at \$10,000. Of course, the eternal salvation of one soul cannot be computed in dollars. But is this what Jesus had in mind when He said, "Go ye . . ." Is there a more effective way to finish the "great gospel commission"? Who doesn't long to see far greater efficiency in soul-winning?

When one reads the letters of the apostles in the New Testament, there seems to be little pressure put upon the, early Christians. Paul commends rather than prods the Thessalonian Christians: "Not only did the message about the Lord go out from you throughout Macedonia and Achaia, but the news about your faith in God has gone everywhere. *"There is nothing, then, that we need to say"* (1 Thess. 1:8, GNB). An evangelist's or church

administrator's dream! No need for high-pressure promotion.

"Pentecost" is a big word to Christian people. It came fifty days after Christ's resurrection. The disciples met together to pray and study for ten days previous, so that by the time that the Day of Pentecost arrived, they were finally in total harmony and unity, "in one accord" (Acts 2:1). (May the Lord hasten the day when His modern "apostles" will finally be in "one accord" in their understanding of the truth of the gospel!).

A great blessing came on that day. The true and genuine "gift of tongues" (not talking in gibberish or shouting or screaming!) was manifest so that everyone from all parts of the world who were gathered in Jerusalem heard the glad tidings in his own language so he could clearly understand it. The Holy Spirit was given in a fullness that has never since been equaled. What was it about the message of Pentecost that had such tremendous power that three thousand were converted, truly converted, in a day? Was it something that even Paul did not as clearly articulate?

A wise writer has said, "Great truths that have lain unheeded and unseen since the day of Pentecost are to shine from God's word in their native purity" (FE 473). Is there a "great truth" that shone clearly on the Day of Pentecost that even the apostle Paul did not preach? Yes, there is one:

Speaking to that great crowd of thousands of people from many nations and languages, Peter boldly declared that *they* had crucified the Son of God: "Therefore, let all the house of Israel know

throughout Macedonia and Achaia, but the news about your faith in God has gone everywhere. There is nothing then, that we need to say" (1 Thess. 1:7, 8, GNB). While it is true that many rejected that gospel, it met precisely the heart-needs of honest people who seemed to come out of the woodwork everywhere.

This stark historical reality is usually brushed off today as an unrepeatable phenomenon. "Times are different," it is said. But the Bible promises a last-days gospel proclamation even greater in scope and success than Pentecost. The earth is to be "lightened" with the glory of a message that will have within itself self-propagating power (Rev. 18:1-4).

God's people 2000 years ago were not different than honest-hearted people today. The missing ingredient today is not human personality, or organizational efficiency. What is missing is the lost content of the message itself. The apostles' gospel was a self-propagating message because it proclaimed Good News about the cross of Christ and what He accomplished by His sacrifice. The News itself "constrained" those who heard it and believed it.

Perhaps you think that the switch in your house turns the electricity on. Wrong! Your electricity is turned on at the power house, and it is flooding your house, wires running all over, ready to run your stove, lights, vacuum cleaner, whatever, 24 hours a day. Your switch turns it off, otherwise your lights would be on all the time!

It meets exactly the heart-longing of every honest-hearted soul in “Babylon” (and there are many!), so that “the truth is seen in its clearness, and the honest children of God sever the bands which have held them. Family connections, church relations, are powerless to stay them now. Truth is more precious than all besides. Notwithstanding the agencies combined against the truth, a large number [will] take their stand upon the Lord’s side” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 612).

Revelation says that the proclamation of “the hour of His judgment is come” will grow to “lighten the earth with glory” (18:1-4). It’s due now—to penetrate Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, all Christian faiths; taking part in that great movement will make life worth living!

Not long ago a survey was made by one denominational church to discover what each new convert cost in evangelism expense: around \$10,000. Many denominations are declining in membership. In North America attendance at worship services often declines, year by year; in Britain churches are being sold and remodeled into business offices or homes, monuments to evangelism failure.

In contrast, the gospel proclamation in New Testament times was phenomenal. The message went like fire in the dry stubble. Every new convert became an energized evangelist, himself/herself an effective conveyor of the message to others for the sheer love of it.

For example, Paul writes to one church: “Not only did the message about the Lord go out from you

assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). A few days later he told them, “Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, . . . and killed the Prince of life” (3:14, 15). Nothing in Paul’s epistles is quite so strong, so directly confrontational!

What happened on the day of Pentecost? A repentance deeper than has ever been known. The murder of the Son of God is the greatest sin ever committed; repentance for that sin is the greatest a human heart can ever know. Do you think it might be possible that Peter’s sermon applies to us today?

There is some refreshing news in Peter’s sermon at Pentecost: “It shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh. . . . Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:17, 21). That sounds like good news, but is it too good?

The words “all flesh” surely mean everybody in the world. How can it be true? Note that Peter does not say that everybody will *receive* the Holy Spirit; he only says that God will give the gift to everybody. Jesus can help us understand. He says that “when He [the Holy Spirit] is come, He will reprove [convict] the world of sin, . . . because they believe not on Me” (John 16:7-9). The Father “so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son” (3:16). Christ “was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (1:9). The ancient Jews wouldn’t believe this, for they thought that only they are “lighted.” But Gentiles are also included!

The Holy Spirit sheds light on every human heart; that person may not *receive* the light, but in the last great judgment day, no one can accuse God of not letting some light shine upon his pathway, some evidence on which that soul could make a choice. In every human heart the Holy Spirit has brought a conviction of sin, a sense of right and wrong. And blessed are those who respond to that conviction the Holy Spirit gives.

But there's another statement in Peter's sermon that arrests our attention: "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13). Of course, that must mean, "in sincerity" (Eph. 6:24). God pays attention to "all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their's and our's" (1 Cor. 1:2). Here is His "much more abounding grace": "the same Lord is rich unto all that call upon Him" (Rom. 10:12). David says, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (Ps. 34:6). Do you feel sinful and unworthy? Call upon the Lord, and believe that in His mercy He will hear you. Yes, He will convict you of sin; but thank Him for that with all your heart!

A Sacramento Juvenile Court judge slapped a severe sentence on a fourteen year old boy and his father. The boy had plotted to rob a fellow-student and employed a sixteen year old relative to beat him so severely that he almost died, and is now crippled for life. Shocked by the cruelty and lack of remorse the assailants showed, the judge ordered the fourteen year old boy and his father to pay \$590,000 in restitution to the victim's family for their

Ellen White in vision witnessed what will happen this second time around: "The light that was shed upon the waiting ones penetrated everywhere, and those in the churches who had any light . . . obeyed the call. . . . A *compelling* power moved the honest [compare that with the word "compels" above in 2 Corinthians 5:14]. . . .

"Servants of God, endowed with power from on high, with their faces lighted up, and shining with holy consecration, went forth to proclaim the message from heaven. Souls that were scattered all through the religious bodies answered to the call, and the precious were hurried out of the doomed churches, as Lot was hurried out of Sodom before her destruction" (*Early Writings*, pp. 278, 279, emphasis added).

That same writer tells how the first Pentecost relates to the future second one: "A work is to be accomplished in the earth similar to that which took place at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the days of the early disciples, when they preached Jesus and Him crucified. Many will be converted in a day; for the message will go with power. . . . The theme that attracts the heart of the sinner is Christ, and Him crucified. On the cross of Calvary, Jesus stands revealed to the world in unparalleled love [*agape*]. Present Him thus to the hungry multitudes, and the light of His love will win men from darkness to light, from transgression to obedience and true holiness. Beholding Jesus upon the cross of Calvary arouses the conscience to the heinous character of sin as nothing else can do" (*1888 Materials*, pp. 1073, 1074).

was only secondary to something greater than itself. If the apostles had given lectures on Roman history miraculously in “tongues,” nobody would have been baptized.

The Day of Pentecost marked the glorious beginning of the proclamation of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, and the inauguration of His High Priestly ministry. “The truth in *agape*” compelled multitudes to respond—3000 in one day. Paul says the message went to all the world in that first generation of Christ’s followers (see Col. 1:6; 1 Thess. 1:8).

What will now mark the ending of that ministry? If the proclamation of the message marked its beginning, it is reasonable to conclude that again the proclamation of the message will mark its ending.

This was “the former rain.” Today we await “the latter rain.” That self-propagating gospel at Pentecost accompanied Christ’s beginning work in heaven as High Priest. Now His closing work in the cosmic Day of Atonement will be accompanied by a fully developed “everlasting gospel” that will “lighten the earth with glory.” The same cross-exalting motivation will fuel that final burst of soul-winning.

Says John in Revelation: “I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, ‘Babylon the great is fallen.’ . . . And I heard another voice from heaven saying, ‘Come out of her, my people . . .’” (18:1-4). The call will be accompanied by a second-time-in-history power—the first, at Pentecost.

medical expenses. Can we gather some warmth out of this “cold” story?

(1) If you are either a student or a parent, you can thank Heaven that you don’t have a \$590,000 debt hanging over your head for life. Parents are held responsible for the folly and crimes of their juvenile offspring; if you have been spared this anguish, rejoice in your good fortune. (2) The beatings and torture inflicted on Jesus of Nazareth left Him crippled for life if He could have survived; a righteous Judge could order all who were involved in the crime to pay restitution for life and for eternity. The truth is that all humanity were involved in the crime.

When Peter at Pentecost charged the crime on his hearers, he was including us. He said, “Both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together” against the Son of God; that includes us (Acts 4:27). Peter said: “You denied the Holy One and the Just . . . and killed the Prince of life” (3:14, 15). Were we there personally? No; neither was the father of this fourteen year old criminal in that high school in Sacramento, yet he is ordered to pay that \$590,000. He shares a corporate guilt with his son.

So do we share a corporate guilt with those who crucified the Son of God. Their crime was the revelation of the world’s guilt before God. Our Creator sends His Son to save us from ourselves, from our Holocausts, Tucsons, and we murder Him! What happened at the cross was the world’s moment of truth; let’s not kid ourselves into thinking that Heaven will not bring us to judgment. The Holy

Spirit will convict us, you, me, including the “world” of sin.

The Juvenile Court judge was in no mood to let this fourteen year old boy and his father off the hook. If the father is already a millionaire, then this judgment is a mere pinprick; but if not, he has a life-long burden to carry.

He can never get himself out of debt. What debt do we have to carry? Well, it too is lifelong, a debt of love, of life-long repentance, yes a debt we cannot even pay off in eternity. Let us thank Heaven that we are forgiven; and God grant us to sense our obligation imposed, not by fear, but by gratitude. Somehow this is related to a proper definition of what faith is!

On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), there was a marvelous outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit. It was likened to the “early rain” that waters freshly planted crops. Ever since, followers of Jesus have longed to see a similar outpouring, which Scripture says will be the “latter rain”—the Holy Spirit that “ripens the grain” to be ready for the harvest; which is, of course, the second coming of Christ.

The “latter rain” has been expected for one hundred fifty years. For decades, millions around the world have been praying every morning at 6 a.m. that the blessing may come. Can we who want it learn something from the history of the “early rain”?

(1) After over three years of teaching, the disciples were finally ready to be “with one accord in one place” (2:1). (2) All their individual desires for promotion were finally laid aside. (3) Self was finally

crucified with Christ so that sinful pride was humbled in the dust. (4) Not one was seeking the highest place in the early church; each was ready to wash the feet of others. (5) They were not praying for power so they could be vindicated before the unbelieving scribes and Pharisees, or to be self-exalted triumphantly; they were praying for something new—the gift of love (*agape*). (6) In fact, they had just begun to understand what love (*agape*) is! They had finally received a sobering lesson—they had seen *agape* in the self-emptying sacrifice of Christ.

And that brings us to (7): Like a burst of lightning on a dark night or the sun shining in full strength at midnight, they had come face to face with the reality of what it cost their Saviour to save them. The Lamb of God had died the world’s “wages of sin.” He had “poured out His soul unto death” (Isa. 53:12), which the apostles clearly understood was the world’s second death. Christ had suffered the horrors of hell in order to save us. And death and hell could not hold the Divine One who had made this supreme sacrifice of *agape*. Now self had to be crucified together with Christ! When they surveyed the wondrous cross on which they had seen the Prince of glory die, their richest gain they counted loss, and poured contempt on all their pride. Is there any lesson here?

In studying about Pentecost, the lesson for us who await “the latter rain” is sharply focused. The “early rain” wasn’t a miracle of elocution that wrought that great work in the hearts of thousands. Peter didn’t show off as a brilliant man. The miracle of “tongues”