

When is the Blood Applied?

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Part Two

Would you be free from the burden of sin?
There's pow'r in the blood,
pow'r in the blood,
Would you o'er evil a victory win?
There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.

Debate About the Blood

At the turn of the twentieth century a new form of Jesus piety emerged among conservative Christians that traced its roots to several strains of Pietism. This was a preoccupation with and intensified focus on devotion to and experience of Christ. I believe it came about first, and largely, as a reaction to the attacks on the deity of Christ by Modernism and Liberalism. Secondly, it was out of concern that the emphasis on the Holy Spirit by the Holiness and Pentecostal traditions would move Christ out of the center of Christian devotion and replace Him with a Holy Spirit centered Christianity.

Among Fundamentalists, an intellectual, apologetic form of Jesus piety sought to return Christ to the center of the Christian faith through greater attention to the deity Christ. Among those from the Holiness/Keswick/Pentecostal stream, there was an anti-intellectual pietism that did not dwell on intellectual proofs, but instead emphasized the "power" of Christianity as its proof. Out of that context there developed a stress on the "Baptism of the Spirit." Along with this tributary, there grew those who sought to reexamine the meaning and importance of the name of Jesus. This was both to defend the deity of Christ and to promote the

personal, experiential power of Christ in the individual Christian's life. It was out of this confluence of reflection that one theology of the name of Jesus eventually lead, through Frank J. Ewart, to the creation of Oneness Pentecostalism.¹

Another expression of this power-Jesus-piety was an accent on the importance of the blood of Jesus. Many writers, preachers and song writers devoted their attention to the power of the blood. The importance of the blood of Jesus in Christian devotion was certainly not new. Yet, at this time, a great deal of interest was shown in the "power of the blood." It seems that this theme was very popular among Pentecostals, as exemplified in a hymn published in an early Pentecostal periodical called *Confidence*:

The Blood, the Blood, the Blood is all our plea;
The Blood, the Blood, the Blood has set us free;
We'll sound its mighty virtues over every
land and sea;
The precious Blood of victory!²

Some of the common themes among Pentecostals (et. al.) were: "pleading the blood," the "language of the blood," the "preciousness of the blood," the "cleansing of the blood" for sanctification as well as justification, and the "healing of the blood." Along with this elaboration of the blood, a debate was swirling around the question: "When is the blood of Jesus applied?" There was concern with how to balance the teaching of faith in the blood or Cross of Jesus with the new truth of Pentecostal Spirit-baptism and all that came with it.

Early Pentecostals and the Blood

The early Pentecostal revival (1906-1910) was led by William J. Seymour (1870-1922) and the Azusa Street Apostolic Faith Gospel Mission. At the beginning it was generally held that the blood was applied in justification (repentance / conversion). For those Holiness Pentecostals, entire sanctification and Spirit-

¹This subject is taken up in a book that I am now working on. BLG.

²Arthur S. Booth Clibborn, "A Hymn of the Blood," *Confidence*, June, 1911, No. 6, Vol. iv, p. 123.

baptism were believed to follow *because* of the blood (justification). For Seymour, the work of the Spirit in entire sanctification and in the Pentecostal Spirit-baptism did not apply the blood or cleanse the heart from sin. He said that the Spirit was not the Savior. It was the blood, which he understood to be received in justification, that cleanses from sin. The cleansing of the blood occurred before Spirit-baptism:

THE SPIRIT FOLLOWS THE BLOOD. Jesus said, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." The cleansing took place before the Pentecostal baptism. Jesus said on that night before he was betrayed, "Now are ye clean, but not all." (He knew that Judas had the devil in him). The disciples had been sanctified before Pentecost, for the word of God is true. We know they had been justified a long time before, for he said, "Rejoice not that the devils are subject unto you but rejoice because your names are written in heaven." And we know they were sanctified when Jesus prayed for them, for Jesus prayers did not have to be answered in the future but were answered right there. He said, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." They were not only sanctified but had received the Holy Spirit in a certain measure, because He breathed on them in the upper room and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Some have put it off that they were not sanctified until Pentecost. But we know the Spirit only follows the blood. The heart must be clean before the Holy Ghost can endue with power from on high. It is not the work of the Holy Ghost to burn up inherited sin and carnality, he is not our Savior. It is the blood that cleanseth us from all sin. The disciples were cleansed and sanctified and were sitting and waiting when the Holy Ghost fell upon them.³

It is said that Seymour was the most influential person of the early Pentecostal revival. Without doubt, he believed that the blood was applied by faith in the work of Christ. *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Azusa Street Apostolic Faith Mission of Los Angeles, Cal., 1915*, was composed by W. J. Seymour.⁴ This

³*The Apostolic Faith*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Los Angeles, CA, September, 1906, p. 3d. This was the official newsletter of the Apostolic Faith Gospel Mission, of 312 Azusa Street, Los Angeles, CA., the home of the Azusa Street Revival from 1906-08.

⁴The statement of faith found in *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Azusa Street Apostolic Faith Mission of Los Angeles, Cal., 1915*, can be traced back to the 39 Articles of the Church of England (1563) through the *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. For the most part Seymour followed the ME church "Articles of Religion" word for word, but he made modifications which appear to come from the *Doctrines and Discipline of*

discipline of ninety-five pages included various teaching, a statement of faith, a catechism, and instruction for church discipline and marriage. In it the Azusa Street church gave this statement about salvation:

We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.⁵

Many of the strange and conflicted views about the blood of Jesus which later came about among many Pentecostals do not appear to result from Seymour. He held an orthodox view of the blood of Jesus and neither spiritualized nor made a sacrament of it. It is ironic that a particular statement of faith appears to be instrumental in mitigating Seymour's speculations. Instead it encouraged his faithfulness to an orthodox view of the blood. In contrast, many of those who were radically anti-creedal and refused to articulate their faith in formal statements, were caught up in many heterodox and unbiblical teachings pertaining to the Atonement.

It was the "full gospel"⁶ notion and impulse in Pentecostalism (received from Holiness thought) that moved many into new and eventually unorthodox views of the blood. The teaching of separate and distinct experiences subsequent to justification and received by separate acts of faith from the justifying faith, required attempts to understand how the blood applied to all these experiences:

Beloved, it honors our Christ for us to seek all that He purchased for us by His atonement on the Cross of Calvary. Let us study and see all

the African Union First Colored Methodist Protestant Church, of the United States of America, or Elsewhere, which was published by the First General Conference of the representatives of the African Union First Colored Methodist Protestant Church at Wilmington, DE, August 25, 1866. The African Union Church was part of the Methodist Episcopal Church until June 1850. All of these statements of faith clearly confess that salvation is by justification through faith in Christ.

⁵*The Doctrines and Discipline of the Azusa Street Apostolic Faith Mission of Los Angeles, Cal., 1915*, by W. J. Seymour, p. 22.

⁶I will address this topic more fully in my book about to be published entitled, *Can the Gospel Be Fractured?: A Response to the 'Full Gospel' Theology*.

that His Blood and the offering of His precious body has bought for us. 1st. We have redemption, the forgiveness of sins . . . 2nd. We receive sanctification through the blood of Jesus . . . 3rd. Through Christ, the precious Lamb of Calvary we have also healing of all our sickness and diseases . . . 4th. Through the atonement we get the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire upon the sanctified life . . . We the messengers of this precious atonement ought to preach all of it, justification, sanctification, healing and the baptism of the Spirit with signs following.⁷

The interplay between “full gospel” theology and conceptions about the blood can be seen in one relevant example. One of the most remarkable articles by an early Pentecostal written about the blood is Alexander Alfred Boddy’s “Pleading the Blood.”⁸ It is a representation of the many conceptions about the blood of Christ which are widespread among many Pentecostals to this very day. Also, it is exceptional for the way it provides a digest of the theology of the blood prevalent at that time. Much of the article is consistent with orthodox Christian teaching about the blood. In that measure, it is a wonderful treatment of the subject. However, it is his few unique ideas that provide insight to the unorthodox ways the blood was viewed later among Pentecostals. Boddy states:

The Sanctified Christian still pleads the Blood as He seeks the full Baptism of the Holy Ghost with scriptural signs. . . . As he tarries he pleads the finished work of Jesus. He pleads the Blood-price, which was paid for this great gift of the Holy Ghost.⁹

Boddy uses sacerdotal typology from the sacrificial system to support this:

In the Levitical days the Oil followed the Blood (Lev. Xiv., 17), and this was to teach us that, in our experience, the Oil of the Spirit comes where the Blood of Calvary has been trusted, honoured, and applied.¹⁰

⁷‘The Precious Atonement,’ *The Apostolic Faith* (Portland) 2 (September, 1908), p. 2. Taken from D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel*, (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 230.

⁸A. A. Boddy, “Pleading the Blood,” *Confidence*, August 15, 1908, No. 5., p. 3.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

Notice he says that the “Oil followed the Blood”? He is saying that the Holy Spirit follows faith in Calvary. I would agree with Boddy if his typology was better matched with orthodox teaching. Those who trust in Christ’s work on the Cross do receive the Holy Spirit, by that same faith (Ephesians 1:13). But, Boddy meant that those who truly trusted in the work of the Cross should expect to receive a Spirit-baptism, signified by tongues, separate and subsequent to trusting in the Cross (justification). This is the Pentecostal or “full gospel” version of the “oil following the blood.”

Boddy advocated an “unlimited salvation,” a full-gospel notion, which included, “Honouring the Precious Blood; Identification with Christ in Death and Resurrection, etc.; Regeneration, Sanctification; the Baptism of the Holy Ghost; the Soon-Coming of the Lord in the air.” He taught that the blood could be “pleaded” for all of these elements of full salvation. Particularly important to Boddy and others was how the blood related to the Pentecostal teaching of Spirit-baptism. The need to connect the doctrine of Atonement with this Pentecostal distinctive urged teachers, such as Boddy, to marshal proofs for how the blood is applied in Spirit-reception.

The next great leader of Pentecostalism was William H. Durham (1873-1912). It is said that the Pentecostal movement shifted from Seymour to Durham in Los Angeles in 1907. Durham contended with the Holiness teaching of entire sanctification prevalent in Pentecostalism before 1910. He was deeply concerned about the importance of the “Finished Work of Christ.” The Atonement and the meaning of the blood were at the center of his ministry and theology:

If the plan of redemption be not true, then the whole New Testament is unworthy of belief, as it is filled with this thought and repeatedly it is positively declared that we are redeemed by the Blood of Christ.¹¹

Durham did not spiritualize the blood but emphatically stood in the biblical orthodox tradition that the blood represents the death of Jesus on the Cross. He

¹¹William H. Durham, “The Finished Work of Calvary – It Makes Plain the Great Work of Redemption,” *Pentecostal Testimony*, Vol. II., No. II, n.d. [May?], 1912, p. 4.

believed that the power and work of the blood of Christ was appropriated by faith in the Cross of Christ:

The basic truths of the Gospel are that Christ became a substitute for sinners and died in their stead, and that men are saved by faith in Him. If this teaching be not true, then the whole Gospel or Christian structure is built upon an absolutely false foundation, Christ was a false teacher and an impostor and all who have trusted in Him are lost.¹²

Durham's theology was "full gospel" and he used that terminology and thought in his writings. His expressions often reflected the conflict between the "full gospel" scheme and the traditional orthodox view of justification by faith. But, he clearly believed that salvation was by faith alone in Jesus' work on the Cross:

The doctrine of the Finished Work, brings us back to the simple plan of salvation. Christ died for us. He became a substitute for every one of us; for He tasted death for every man. Here is a truth so simple and yet so great that it is wonderful. We are not saved simply because we are forgiven our sins. We are saved through identification with our Savior Substitute, Jesus Christ. We are given life because He died for us and rose again. But some one may ask, "How do we become identified with our Substitute?" We answer, "By faith alone." . . . When the truth is preached and we tremblingly fall at His feet and cry out, "What must I do?" The word comes back "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." . . . This make Christ all in all as Savior, and faith the only means by which we can become identified with Him.¹³

¹²Ibid., 2.

¹³Ibid.

Durham,¹⁴ being a Pentecostal, was careful to distinguish the work of the blood in conversion from the reception of Spirit-baptism. He saw Spirit-baptism as subsidiary to justification by faith:

A man receives Christ by faith, and is saved from all sin. He is washed in the precious Blood. This prepares him for the incoming and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Christ is the Savior. The Holy Spirit is the Comforter.¹⁵

¹⁴David Bernard of the UPCI has stated that Durham would have become a Oneness Pentecostal if he had lived longer. He sees Durham as a proto-Oneness of sorts because of certain statements made by Durham. It is my opinion that Bernard and others have significantly missed the thrust of Durham's thought. He was contending with Holiness thought, and not seeking to create a new formula of salvation by identification. For Durham to have become Oneness would require him to reject many of the things he taught: 1) Durham writing about "false doctrines" rejected equating Spirit-baptism with the New Birth: "Some came forward with the theory that the baptism in the Spirit and the new birth were synonymous, thus taking the position that only those who had the baptism and spoke in tongues were saved at all. As every reliable or representative teacher in the movement stood firmly for the truth that only saved people could receive the Holy Spirit, that He would never come into the temple till it was thoroughly cleansed, this teaching was nipped in the bud." 2) He rejected the idea that only those who received the Pentecostal Spirit-baptism were saved: "If the teaching be true, that only those who have received the Holy Spirit are saved, then we have all been deceived all these years and were not saved at all. . . . We were not deceived. We were saved. . . . The Apostles had accepted or received Christ long before Pentecost and were saved, and their names were written in Heaven." 3) He rejected the idea that Jesus and the Holy Spirit were the same Person: "They even declare that Christ and the Holy Spirit are one and the same. . . . we do say that Christ and the Holy Spirit are not in the Scripture one and the same. The Word of God speaks of them always as different Persons of the Godhead." 4) He rejected the teaching of water baptism in Jesus' name only: "Another doctrine which we believe should be classed as false, is the teaching that converts should be baptized in the name of Jesus only. In Matt. 28:19 Jesus, after His resurrection, gives His instructions to His Disciples before leaving them, and He said, 'Baptising them into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' Nothing could be plainer. To our mind there is no conflict between this plain command and those passages in the Name of Jesus. The words of Jesus quoted above are sufficient for me." (Note: These statements were made at least two or three year before the 1913 Arroyo Seco message on Jesus' name baptism.) These four points present a tremendous disagreement between Durham and key Oneness teachings. It seems that Bernard's attempt to co-opt Durham is more wishful than based on Durham's own convictions. [Quotes of Durham from William H. Durham, *Pentecostal Testimony Papers*, n.d. [1911?], Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Assemblies of God Archives.]

¹⁵William H. Durham, *Pentecostal Testimony Papers*, n.d. [1911?], Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Assemblies of God Archives.

The debate about the blood was over how to relate certain theological distinctives to a group's underlying understanding of the Atonement. For Holiness advocates, this consisted of how to link the blood to entire sanctification. For Pentecostals, it was how to connect the blood to Spirit-baptism, the gifts and divine healing. The general view which developed was the belief that the blood was applied in conversion and in all of the subsequent realities of the "full gospel." Theologically, it is sound to tie all of the benefits of salvation to the work of the blood of Jesus. Everything that God does in the Christian's life is accomplished by and mediated through Christ's atoning work. However, a lack of proper understanding about this relationship and the meaning of the blood has led to a number of unorthodox and unbiblical teachings. It has encouraged many to misplace their faith in mystical notions and a spiritualizing of the blood, rather than center it in the Person of Christ and His Work accomplished on the Cross.