

When A Backslidden Pastor and the Mafia Encounter Holy Spirit

This Sunday is Pentecost Sunday, when churches around the world will remember and celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Pentecost, however, was never meant to be a yearly celebration on the church calendar. It was meant to be the very life of the church, empowering each member to be an effective witness for Jesus Christ.

As an illustration of this, I want to share with you the following amazing story.

The Holy Spirit and a Backslidden Pastor

It was the most unusual introduction. After two weeks in our new home, Sue and I came face to face with our nextdoor neighbor, who was a tough looking woman in her mid-50s. We shook her hand and told her our names. With a cigarette dangling from her mouth she replied, "My name's Adele. I'm a backslidden pastor from Brooklyn, New York."

We had no contact with Adele for the next three weeks except to wave if we saw her in her yard. It was obvious to us that she had been through some deep and painful experiences with church. A superficial Christian cliché or a chick tract would do nothing for her, except probably make her angry.

The Holy Spirit, however, knows how to reach the most difficult cases and He moved powerfully one day as Sue and I were about to back out of our driveway. Sue, who was driving, suddenly sensed a deep compassion flowing from her heart toward Adele who was working in her yard.

We sat for a moment not sure how to respond to what Sue was

experiencing. Finally, Sue rolled down her window and called out, "Adele!" Adele came walking over with the ever-present cigarette dangling from her mouth. When she reached the window, Sue suddenly began speaking to her in tongues.

I was sitting in the passenger seat and had the interpretation, which was a prophetic word for Adele. I knew that I should look her in the face and so I leaned across Sue in the driver's seat, looked Adele in the face, and said, "Adele, God is saying to you, 'My daughter, you are precious in my sight.'"

Adele burst into tears and then broke out praying in tongues and we had revival there in our driveway. God bonded our hearts together. She later came to our home and shared how she had grown up in a Catholic, mafia family in Brooklyn and had joined the mafia herself on becoming an adult. However, one of her uncles and his wife had come to Christ and invited her to church. She went and had a glorious encounter with the Lord.

She was on fire for the Lord and opened a storefront church in Brooklyn where she was reaching many of the homeless, drug addicts and what someone described as "the hard cases." However, opposition from Christians to her pastoring as a woman and an ill-advised marriage to a husband who turned on her, brought her to despair.

She gave up on church, but she did give up on Jesus. That day in our driveway a tremendous healing took place in her soul and her faith and hope were renewed.

About two months after this encounter, Adele and her husband (since deceased) moved to Florida. We stayed in touch and several months later I received an email from Adele saying:

"I am putting a check in the mail. I want you and Sue to come to Florida for about three days, and you can stay with us. I will have about 40 people in our home. Most of them are not Christians. Do whatever God tells you to do."

The Holy Spirit Falls

We arrived at Adele's home in Port St. Lucie, Florida, and later that evening the people she had invited began to arrive. As starting time neared, the living room and kitchen were filled with people and it seemed that everyone was smoking. The living room and kitchen seemed to be filled with smoke.

Many of the people were members of the mafia or former members. They were Adele's friends. One little Italian woman's husband was a mafia boss who had recently been sent to prison. She had come to Florida to work for her brother who owned a pizza chain. Some of the people had been members of Adele's church in Brooklyn, and when she "backslid" they all backslid with her.

A woman sitting across the kitchen table from Sue and me had been a part of Adele's congregation in Brooklyn. She shared with us how she and her family had moved to Florida and opened a restaurant. As smoke billowed around us, she said to me, "We're all backslid." I thought to myself, "Well, at least they are not trying to impress me with how spiritual they are."

Starting time arrived and I picked up my guitar intending to lead them in some praise and worship. It soon became obvious, however, that I was the only one singing. Everyone seemed to just stare at me as they puffed on their cigarettes and blew smoke.

Realizing the music was taking us nowhere, I put my guitar aside and picked up my Bible. God had given me a message about His unconditional love, and as I shared this message I sensed a change occurring in the atmosphere. At some point, I noticed that everyone had put out their cigarettes and the smoke had dissipated. As I completed my message, a sense of solemnness and the fear of the Lord seemed to fill the atmosphere.

I then invited anyone who wanted prayer to come forward to

receive prayer from Sue and me. Everyone sat quietly as if afraid to move. Adele then stepped forward and said, "I know that everyone here needs prayer; so come on up and let Eddie and Sue pray for you."

The first person to come up was Isabelle who was from Brooklyn and part of a mafia family. She was in deep depression for her husband and two sons had been murdered by a rival mafia family and her daughter was a drug addict, living on the street.

As we laid our hands on Isabelle and prayed, she began to sob and then fell to the floor. We had no catchers, but no one cared. Their minds were now taken up with God and they probably had never heard of such a thing. Another person then came up for prayer, and she too fell to the floor.

At this point, the Holy Spirit "fell" on the people just like in the book of Acts. Pandemonium seemed to break out. Suddenly, everyone was on their knees or on the floor, weeping and calling out to God at the top of their voices. It was a surreal moment when God came down and did a mighty work beyond anything we could have ever imagined or planned.

What an incredible time! Later that evening there was a release of joy such as I have never seen. Our hearts were further bonded with Adele, and we have been back several times for meetings with her and those we call our mafia friends.

We Must Have a New Pentecost

As an individual who grew up in rural East Texas in a small country church, I was not naturally equipped to reach members of the NYC mafia. It is not our slick presentations and human talents, however, that will reach this generation for Christ. We must have the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus said would equip us to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). Without the Holy Spirit, we are nothing.

Let us, therefore, admit our human inadequacy and confess to

God how much we need the promised baptism in the Holy Spirit. Let us pray for a new Pentecost at this critical time in America, the church and the world. {eo}

Dr. Eddie Hyatt has taught on the *Power of Pentecost* throughout the world. His book, *2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity*, published by Charisma House, is used as a textbook in many colleges and seminaries and is required reading by numerous churches, fellowships and denominations. He has also produced *Revival History*, a manual and study guide to go with the book, which contains 20 outlined lessons, pictures, reflection questions and essays. Both are available from Amazon and his website at www.eddiehyatt.com.

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