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Christian History Made Easy Participant Guide

18. Session 12: A Global Gospel (AD 1900–Present)

This chapter traces Christianity through the twentieth century into today. It opens with optimism that Christians might unite to reach the world, then follows how that hope fractured into fundamentalism, modernism, evangelicalism, Pentecostalism, and the ecumenical movement. The recurring question is: what is the gospel, and how does each generation faithfully proclaim it?

Key takeaways

- Early 1900s optimism (science and unity would fix the world) was shattered by two world wars and the Depression.
- Pentecostalism began with Charles Parham's tongues teaching (1901) and the Azusa Street Revival under William Seymour (1906); Assemblies of God formed 1914.
- Fundamentalism rose to defend core beliefs against liberalism/modernism, but many fundamentalists kept adding non-negotiables and withdrew from culture entirely.
- Theological liberalism downplayed Scripture's authority and reshaped faith to fit modern culture.

- Neo-orthodoxy (Karl Barth) rejected liberalism but did not treat Scripture as inerrant—calling it a witness to Christ, the one Word of God.
- Evangelicals (neo-evangelicals) held to Scripture's authority AND engaged culture—unlike both modernists and separatist fundamentalists.
- The ecumenical movement (World Council of Churches 1948, Vatican II, Lausanne Covenant 1974, Manhattan Declaration 2009) sought unity across churches, with mixed results.
- Bonhoeffer and Corrie ten Boom show the cost of faithfulness under Nazism; discipleship means counting the cost.

Passages worth keeping

“A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross.”

H. Richard Niebuhr's summary exposing the emptiness of the liberal gospel.

“Whereas once the redemptive gospel was a world-changing message, now it was narrowed to a world-resisting message.... While we are pilgrims here, we are ambassadors also.”

Carl F. H. Henry's rebuke of fundamentalist retreat from culture.

How it connects

The chapter's thread is the ongoing "battle for the Bible": every generation must decide whether Scripture is God's authoritative word. Bonhoeffer's point—that we find God at the foot of the Cross, on His terms not ours—and Luther's reminder that God, not us, preserves His church, frame the reassurance that God stays faithful whatever the future holds.

Scripture referenced

- **Acts 2** -- Day of Pentecost—the source of the Pentecostal name and theology.
- **2 Timothy 3:14–17** -- Cited on what Scripture is and what it is for.
- **2 Peter 1:16–21** -- Scripture's divine origin and authority.
- **John 17:13–18** -- Being in the world but not of it—engaging culture without conforming.
- **1 John 2:15–17** -- Warning against loving the world's values.
- **2 Corinthians 11:24–27** -- Paul's sufferings—counting the cost of gospel faithfulness.