

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND YOU

### *Pentecost Made Practical*

According to one of the most reliable calculations, it was exactly 1973 years ago, on May 24, AD 33, that the amazing events of Pentecost took place. And what you have just heard read is the inspired account of those events given to us by the Apostle Luke.

Think with me for a moment: If Pentecost had not taken place, what difference would it really make in your life?

Some of you might say, “Well, really very little at all! After all, such strange events experienced by a small group of seemingly religious fanatics nearly 2000 years ago has little relevance to my life today.”

But the vast majority of you, who claim to be Christ followers, at least give mental assent to the importance of these events. You’ve probably read this astounding account many times. But maybe because of the strange and unexplainable (after all, the unexplainable makes us uncomfortable!), you’ve pretty much dismissed the account from having much relevance to your life today.

So over this past week I’ve asked *myself* the question: If Pentecost didn’t take place, what difference would it really make in my life?

A body without breath is a corpse. An individual or a church without the Holy Spirit is spiritually dead. A. W. Tozer once said, “If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and *no one* would know the difference.” But then he adds: “If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and *everybody* would know the difference.”<sup>i</sup>

So what about you? And what about our church? And what about *the* Church of Jesus Christ? If the Holy Spirit were taken away, would it really make any difference in our lives?

### **I. Pentecost experienced by the disciples.**

Luke begins his story by stating, “When the day of Pentecost came” (2:1). Pentecost was one of seven important feasts celebrated by the Jews. Three of these feasts were celebrated in the Jewish month of Nisan (our March/April):

- Passover: *redemption in Christ* (14<sup>th</sup> day of the month)
- Unleavened Bread: *communion with Christ* (15<sup>th</sup> day of the month)
- First Fruits: *resurrection of Christ*<sup>ii</sup> (16<sup>th</sup> day of the month)

But fifty days following the festival of First Fruits came Pentecost.<sup>iii</sup> In fact, the word *Pentecost* means “fiftieth.” The Old Testament explanation of this festival is found in Leviticus 23:15-21.

Let me just read you two verses from that chapter that speak of the importance of what Luke describes for us in Acts 2:

Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an *offering of new grain* to the LORD. From wherever you live, bring *two loaves* made of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of firstfruits to the LORD. Leviticus 23:16, 17

For Israel, Pentecost was a time of *harvest*. They presented an “offering of new grain” to the Lord. For the church also Pentecost is a time of harvest, not agriculturally, but spiritually. According to Luke, on this day alone over 3, 000 came to faith in Jesus Christ (2:41).

For Israel, Pentecost was also a time of *unity*. Later in Israel’s history it became one of the great pilgrimage feasts when Jews scattered throughout the Roman world would return to Jerusalem (Acts 20:16). In fact, such unity is already implied in the offering of the “two loaves” of bread. The New Testament tells us that those two loaves are both Jew and Gentile now bound together in one body and given the same Holy Spirit.<sup>iv</sup>

On this particular day, the disciples – about 120 of them we are told in Acts 1:15 – were gathered together in one place. They had already been told by Jesus himself to *wait*.

Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:4-5

Before the message could progress, the men (the missionaries) had to be prepared. So they’re simply doing what Jesus told them to do; they’re staying in Jerusalem and waiting...and praying.

But this is where the story gets exciting. Suddenly, there is supernatural *sound, sight* and *speech*. The *sound* is like the “blowing of a violent wind.” Moses tells us that God breathed into the first man’s nostrils and he became a living soul (Genesis 2:7). Jesus tells us: “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). The Spirit is like a wind, bringing life.

But then there is the *sight* of “what seemed to be tongues of fire.” If the wind speaks of life and power, then the tongues speak of passion and purity (Deuteronomy 5:4). In Exodus 19, God descends on Mt Sinai in fire and smoke as the Ten Commandments are given to Moses, marking the birth of the nation of Israel. So here, tongues of fire descend on the disciples, marking the birth of the church.

And finally we see the disciples *speaking* in other tongues. That these “tongues” are real languages and *not* incoherent babbling or unintelligible sounds is crystal clear from what follows. More than 15 different nationalities and dialects (listed in verses 5-12) make up the crowd of people witnessing this phenomena. And they all hear the disciples speaking the wonders of God *in their own language!*

What we have here is nothing less than a reversal of the experience of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). Think of it. There the whole world, having one language and a common speech (Genesis 11:1), arrogantly tries to ascend to heaven. But at Pentecost, heaven humbly descends to earth. At Babel, the languages are confused and the people dispersed. At Pentecost, the languages are understood and the people unified.

That's the experience of Pentecost. What's the explanation?

## II. Pentecost explained by Peter and Paul.

Starting in verse 14, Peter stands up to speak, saying, "Let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say." After dismissing the crazy notion that these men are drunk, he quotes from Joel 2:28-32. Notice verses 17-18:

'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

In other words, Peter is saying: The sounds, sight and speech that you have just witnessed is in fulfillment of what the prophet Joel promised long ago.<sup>v</sup> It isn't contrived; it isn't staged. And these people certainly aren't drunk. After all, who gets drunk at 9:00 in the morning? No, what you see and hear is the sure sign that the Spirit of God has come as promised.

Peter could well have quoted other passages, like Ezekiel 37:14, "I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live."<sup>vi</sup> Or he could have cited the words spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts." Jeremiah 31:33

Think of this. Moses came down from Mt. Sinai with "tables of stone, written with the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18). But when the Spirit of God comes down from heaven, he takes the law of God and writes it on human hearts (Hebrews 8:10; 10:16).

Or Peter could have cited the words of Jesus in the Upper Room:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. ... for he lives *with* you and will be *in* you. John 14:16, 17

The Spirit is Jesus' "going-away present," his "ascension gift" to his disciples. Here, Jesus is saying, "I will now exchange my physical presence for my *omni-presence*." God's people (whether under the Old Covenant or the New) are known as the "people of the Presence" (i.e. God's presence). But while in the Old Testament, the Spirit was at times *with* believers and *on* believers<sup>vii</sup> — empowering them to do God's will, he now at Pentecost comes to live permanently *in* believers. Pentecost is the fulfillment of God's promise to live *in* his people by his Holy Spirit.

That's Peter's explanation. What is the Apostle Paul's take on these events? We find that in 1 Corinthians 12:13:

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given one Spirit to drink.

Remember what Jesus told his disciples in Acts 1? “Go to Jerusalem and wait...for John *baptized* with water, but in a few days you will be *baptized* with the Holy Spirit.” Peter and Paul are in absolute agreement on this topic that has caused such controversy in the church at large. The “baptism of the Spirit” takes place at the point of conversion. “Baptism” means simply “to place into.” The “baptism of the Spirit” is that act by which a person who believes is *placed into Christ and his Body, the Church*. The “baptism of the Spirit” then *is not* a second experience following our conversion to Christ. Rather, the moment you truly believe in Jesus Christ as your savior and leader, you are “baptized” by the Holy Spirit into Christ.

You might ask: But weren't the disciples already believers? And wasn't it later on that they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Yes, but they were *not* believers in the sense that you and I are. They had the Holy Spirit *on* them and *around* them,<sup>viii</sup> but not *in* them. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came for the first time to live permanently in all who believe in Jesus Christ.

But there's another disturbing question you might have about the events of Pentecost. What about the sounds, sight and speech that Luke so graphically describes in Acts 2? Should I expect that to happen when I receive the Holy Spirit?

As for the sounds of wind and sight of tongues of fire, remember that Pentecost parallels what took place at the giving of the Law on Mt Sinai. There the nation of Israel was born. On Pentecost the church was born. We should not expect the same phenomena to take place each time one comes to Christ. Nor do we see these same sounds of wind and sight of tongues of fire in the rest of the book of Acts.

What we do see reoccurring in three other instances is the phenomena of “speaking in tongues” (Acts 8:14-17 implied; 10:34-47; 19:1-7). Why is this and what does it mean? Should it happen today when one comes to Christ?

Again, I'll let Paul answer that. And he does in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. Now we'll come back to this question in a few weeks when we address the issue of spiritual gifts. But for now, let me give you three points that summarize Paul's teaching in these chapters:

1. **All tongues are a *real language* spoken somewhere on earth (Acts 2:6-10).** This rules out all gibberish, stammering, repetitious sounds or ecstatic speech. In Acts 2, people from various nations heard the praises of God *in their own language*. There is no reason to believe that the tongues that Paul speaks of differ from the tongues mentioned in Acts 2. The same word is used. Luke certainly would have known what Paul meant in 1 Corinthians 12-14 since they traveled together and both use the same word.<sup>ix</sup>
2. **Uninterpreted tongues as in Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 are given as a *sign of judgment to unbelievers* (1 Corinthians 14:20-25).** This is the only place in the New Testament where the purpose of tongues is given. Here's what Paul says,

Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. In the Law it is written:

Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.

Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers.

Here Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11, 12. The prophet Isaiah is warning the ten tribes of Northern Israel of impending disaster. He tells them that if they do not heed his warning and repent, then Assyria will invade. Speaking a foreign language, the Assyrians will bring judgment on Israel. Derek Kidner paraphrases the prophet's words this way: "Make nonsense of God's sense and you will get your fill of it." In other words, if you make nonsense of God's good sense (and fail to repent), then you will get a lot of nonsense! The Assyrians speaking a foreign language you don't understand will come and devastate you.

And so Paul adds, "Tongues (i.e. tongues that are not interpreted, which is his whole argument here) are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers." That is the exact opposite of what we are sometimes told. But it is exactly what we see in the book of Acts (2, 8, 10, 19). In each case, Jews are present and tongues both authenticate the message of the Gospel and serve as a warning of impending judgment.<sup>x</sup> That judgment finally fell on unbelieving Israel in AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman armies under Titus.

So what is Paul telling the Corinthians and you and me? He is saying that *uninterpreted* tongues (which we often hear these days, or at least what passes for tongues) is *not* a sign of *spirituality* and God's favor but a sign of *carnality* and God's judgment.

- 3. Tongues are not for every believer (1 Corinthians 12:28-30).** "Do all speak in tongues?" Paul asks. And the expected answer is "No!" Tongues are not mentioned at all for many others who are converted in the book of Acts. And neither are the phenomena of wind and fire. But are all believers baptized by the Holy Spirit? Paul says "Absolutely yes!" in 1 Corinthians 12:13. So are tongues the necessary evidence of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit? No, not at all.

What then *does* happen at the baptism of the Holy Spirit? The Bible says many things take place. Not only are you placed into Christ and his Body, as we have already seen. But you are "reborn." Paul writes to Titus saying, "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5).

But that's not all. The Holy Spirit comes to live permanently in your life. Paul writes to the Roman believers: "You, however, are controlled, not by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."

But that's not all. The Holy Spirit "seals" the believer, guaranteeing your salvation. To the Ephesians Paul writes: "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13).

And it is to that saving faith that Peter calls the crowds on Pentecost:

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call. Acts 2:37-39

Now I want to speak to each of you very personally (not that I haven’t all through this message!). Are you here today without the Holy Spirit of God in your life? Then what God is calling you to this morning is *salvation*.

According to the Bible, there are only two kinds of people in the world today: Those who have the Holy Spirit and those who don’t. Do you have the Holy Spirit in your life? If you do, you’ll know it. The Bible says that the Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:16). If not, it’s because you have never recognized your need, repented of your sin, and come to Jesus, the Saviour of your soul. You can do that this morning. How? Do what Peter says as he quotes the prophet Joel: “Call on the name of the Lord.” Confess with your mouth “Jesus is Lord” (he is God in the flesh) and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, and you will be saved. (Romans 10: 9). And when you do, the promise of God’s Holy Spirit is for you.

Maybe you’re here this morning and you are a believer, but you have never taken the public step of water baptism. Then the step God is calling you to this morning is *water baptism*. Notice Peter’s words: “Repent and *be baptized* (not in the Holy Spirit but in water) *everyone of you*, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness for your sins” (Acts 2:38). Peter is *not* saying that water baptism saves anyone. The phrase “for the forgiveness of sins” is better translated “because of” or “as a sign of” the forgiveness of your sins.<sup>xi</sup> Are you here today as an “un-baptized” believer? I encourage you to get that right in your life. We’re giving you the opportunity to do that right now. The baptistery is open and we are ready to help you take that step of obedience today.

But maybe you’re here this morning and you have the Spirit of God in your life, and you’ve taken that step of obedience in baptism. But you’re saying, “God, I want more of you in my life.” Or better, “God, I want you to have more of *my* life. I want to be filled with the Spirit.”

Paul says, “Do not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). This is the *only* command we are given in relation to the Holy Spirit in the Bible. We are *never* commanded to be baptized with the Spirit. God does that when we believe. We are *never* told to be “reborn” or “washed” by the Spirit. God does that when we believe. We are *never* told to be indwelt by the Spirit. God does that when you believe. We are *never* commanded to be sealed with the Spirit. God does that when you believe. But we *are* told to be filled with the Spirit. God will do that when you, believer, make yourself available to Holy Spirit.

I can't help but believe that in a congregation like this there are many of us that can relate to at least one of those three situations. As we sing this song, "Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me," – make that your prayer. And as you sing, I invite you to come forward. If you would like to receive water baptism, Pastor Shon is here and will help you get prepared. (Don't worry, we have everything you'll need, including a robe to be baptized in and towels to dry with!). If you would like to express your faith in Christ, come tell me and I'll pray with you. If you are struggling, need prayer and would like to ask God to fill you in a new way with his Spirit, go to one of members or elders who are standing. They would love to pray with you.

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<sup>i</sup> SOURCE: The Holy Spirit: Missing, Citation: Alan Redpath in "Christian Life" magazine. Christianity Today, Vol. 29, no. 18. Contributed by: A. Todd Coget

<sup>ii</sup> 1 Cor. 15:23.

<sup>iii</sup> The festival of Pentecost is also called the Feast of Harvest, the Feast of Weeks and the Day of Fruits in the OT. It was the culmination of the Feast of Weeks (Ex. 34:22; Deut. 16:10).

<sup>iv</sup> John 10:16; Ephesians 2:11-22; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

<sup>v</sup> Many have questioned why Peter cites this entire passage from Joel when the phenomena mentioned in verses 19-20 weren't fulfilled on Pentecost. There were no "billows of smoke." The sun didn't turn dark and the moon didn't look like blood. Apparently, these phenomena will not be fulfilled until the return of Christ. The most natural explanation is that Peter cites the entire passage in order to come to verse 21: "An everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

<sup>vi</sup> Or Jeremiah 33:14, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts."

<sup>vii</sup> In the NT, the Spirit lives *within* the believer (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Rom 8:9-11; Eph 2:22). In contrast, the Spirit's ministry in the OT is characterized as being *with* or coming *upon* believers (see Jud 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 1 Sam 10:9, 10; and especially 1 Sam 16:14). In some cases, the Spirit of God is described as living "in" believers, but this is certainly a temporary indwelling and not permanent as for believers under the New Covenant (see Genesis 41:38; Exod 28:3; 31:3; Num 11:17, 25; 27:18; Dan 4:8; 5:11-14). David prayed, "Do not take your Holy Spirit from me" (Psalm 51:11).

<sup>viii</sup> See John 20:22

<sup>ix</sup> Other points to consider are: (1) Luke wrote Acts *after* Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and they certainly discussed these questions; (2) 1 Corinthians 14 limits "on one understands" (14:2) by "in the church" (14:4,5,15,16, 19), meaning that the language is unknown to the speaker and his audience, but is still is a known language in the world; (3) "kinds of tongues" (1 Corinthians 12:10; Greek *gene*) suggests reaces, as in the diversification of the languages at Babel (Gen. 11:7); (4) Paul's OT quote (1 Cor. 14:21) must be understood as foreign languages in Isaiah 28:11; (5) the gift of "interpretation" is a word that can mean "to translate;" (6) the "other tongues" (Acts 2:4) is a divine interpretation of "new tongues" (Mark 16:17), i.e. "new" to the speaker.; (7) the supplied word "unknown" in the KJV translation of 1 Corinthians 14 ("unknown tongue") is *not* in the original text; (8) the "tongues of angels" mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:1 is hyperbole, a literary device to get across his point, and *not* a theological statement about the nature of tongues. That this is true is seen in verse 2. Even Paul could not "fathom all mysteries and all knowledge." The conclusion? If Acts 2:4 and Isaiah 28:11 (cited in 1 Corinthians 14:21) refer to real foreign languages, then so does all of 1 Corinthians 14.

<sup>x</sup> The audience in each context bears this out: Acts 2:14 – unsaved Jews; Acts 8:14-17 – saved Jews doubting God's plan for a world church; Acts 10:34-47 – saved Jews doubting God's plan; Acts 10:1-7 – OT believers somewhat confused about the coming Messiah. In the Acts passages, there is also the aspect of authenticating the spread of the Gospel as it progresses from believing Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 2) to Samaritans (Acts 8), and then to Gentiles (Acts 10).

<sup>xi</sup> Compare Matthew 10:41 where the same Greek construction is used.