

PENTECOST: THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

Acts 2:1-41

Pentecost Sunday: May 31, 2020

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the disciples, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one 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 your children, and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call"

Acts 2:36-39

Introduction: wind, fire, water and oil

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a mighty wind came from heaven and filled the whole house

Acts 2:1



What is “this”?

*“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this:
God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”
Acts 2:36*

1) Someone to believe in: _____

2) Someone to live for: _____

The “end” of the “first” of the “last”

*“In these 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.”
Acts 2:17, Peter is quoting Joel 2:28*

1) Last: Pentecost is the _____

2) First: Pentecost is _____

3) The end of the day: Pentecost is _____

1. objectively: _____

2. subjectively: _____



How the Holy Spirit works in the second half of Acts 2 (which is today!)

... And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:47

1) The Holy Spirit has always worked _____ and _____

2) The Holy Spirit still _____

3) I still need _____

Resources for further studies on Pentecost

Bob Deffinbaugh's sermon (the first of four very good sermons) on Pentecost at <https://bible.org/seriespage/3-pentecost-acts-21-13>

Spurgeon's series of messages on Pentecost (especially "Pricked to the Heart") at <https://www.monergism.com/topics/sermon-manuscripts-mp3s-scripture/acts/chapter-acts/chapters-01-02>

ThirdMill has a wonderful lesson on the work of the Holy Spirit at <https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/237> and on Pentecost in particular at <https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp?vs=ACT&ln=3&ft=a>

"4 Truths of Pentecost" at <https://www.crossway.org/articles/4-truths-about-pentecost/>

Steven McCarthy has a wonderful series of "Being a Pentecostal Christian" essays at <https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/being-pentecost-christian-gifts-and-gift>

Reformation21's "Five Extraordinary Benefits" article at <https://www.reformation21.org/blogs/five-extraordinary-benefits-of.php>

Ligon Duncan has some wonderful Acts 2 sermons at <https://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/scripture/acts>

Keith Mathison does a good job of explaining what is new at Pentecost at <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/new-covenant/>

The Gospel Coalition's article at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/pentecost-first-of-the-last-days/>

Kevin DeYoung's "Primer on the Holy Spirit" at <https://www.knowltonpca.org/newsletter/2018/5/31/theological-primer-the-holy-spirit-by-kevin-deyoung>

John Piper has an interesting sermon on how the Holy Spirit worked in the lives of OT saints at <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/how-believers-experienced-the-spirit-before-pentecost>

Timothy Keller's "Signs of the King" at <https://www.monergism.com/signs-king-%E2%80%93-acts-237-47>

D.A. Carson's brilliant response to heresy regarding the Holy Spirit at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/carson-and-keller-on-jakes-and-the-elephant-room/>

Alexander Maclaren's commentary on Acts 2 (especially his "4-fold work of the Spirit") at https://thirdmill.org/magazine/article.asp/link/ale_maclaren%5Eale_maclaren.ES.12.html/at/Expositions%20of%20Holy%20Scripture

4 Truths about Pentecost

November 23, 2019 by: Robert Letham

<https://www.crossway.org/articles/4-truths-about-pentecost/>

1. *The Holy Spirit inseparably continues the ministry of the Father and the Son.*

He was sent in place of the physical presence of Jesus. The ministry of the apostles and the early church in the power of the Spirit continued Jesus's ministry (Acts 1:1–2; 2:47; cf. John 16:12–15). Again, Paul reflects on the Father sending the Son in his incarnation and so also the Spirit at Pentecost; not only is the Spirit sent by the Father, but he is also called “the Spirit of [the Father's] Son” (Gal. 4:4–6). The Father also is said to send the Spirit (John 14:26), while the Son also sends him, having received him from the Father (Acts 2:33). Much in the New Testament supports the Orthodox point that the Spirit is sent by the Father and received by the Son, here and at his baptism, with the Son then pouring him out on his church.

This single-volume systematic theology seeks to provide a clear and concise articulation of the Reformed faith, rooted in historical teaching while addressing current challenges in the life of the church.

2. *Pentecost thus marks a new era in the history of redemption.*

It fulfills Old Testament prophecy. The Spirit is now present in a heightened way. He *was* present in the Old Testament (he could hardly have been absent) but not in the foreground as in the New. How and in what ways was the Spirit active in the Old Testament? Warfield, in considering the work of the Spirit in the cosmos, the kingdom of God, and the individual, concluded that he was at work in all the ways in which he is at work in the New Testament.¹ However, there is something new: first, the miraculous endowments of the apostles, together with the churches they founded; second, the worldwide mission of the Spirit, promised in the Old Testament but only now realized; and, third and principally, the fact that the Old Testament was preparatory for the New Testament, the Spirit then preserving the people of, whereas now he produces “the fruitage and gathering of the harvest.”²

The distinction is not between his presence now compared with a putative absence in the Old Testament but rather between the falling away of what was preparatory and temporary (the Old Testament) and the emergence of what is final, binding and permanent (the New). Galatians 4:4–6 is again pertinent. Israel was God's son in the Old Testament, but it was so in a way little short of servant status. It was a child in its minority, under the protection of a pedagogue, a slave entrusted with its care and upbringing (Gal. 3:24). With Christ's coming and the Spirit's sending at Pentecost, God's people have been adopted as mature sons. So significant is the sending of the Spirit that Paul describes this transition in absolute terms, as elsewhere does John (John 1:17; 4:24). Hence, in the Old Testament the Spirit came intermittently on the prophets, whereas now he is poured out on all flesh (Acts 2:16–21). Then his presence with his people was spasmodic (Ps. 51:11); now he is given permanently (John 14:17, 23).

The Old Testament describes him as the giver of life (Gen. 1:2; Pss. 33:9; 104:29–30), the One who empowers for various forms of service in God's kingdom (Ex. 31:3; 35:31–34; Num. 27:18; Judg. 3:10; 1 Sam. 16:13), as

the protector of God's people (1 Sam. 19:20, 23; Isa. 63:11–12; Hag. 2:5), indwelling them (Num. 27:18; Deut. 34:9; Ezek. 2:2; 3:24; Dan. 4:8–9, 18; 5:11; Mic. 3:8), and above all resting on and empowering the Messiah (Isa. 11:2–3; 42:1; 61:1).

In the New Testament the Spirit is presented as the One who purifies and sanctifies (Matt. 3:11; Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:22–23; 1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Pet. 1:2); reveals truth to the apostles and prophets, teaches and illumines all God's people (Luke 12:12; John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 12:10 ff.; 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 2:19–27); directs the apostles, evangelists, prophets, and other church leaders (Acts 8:29; 10:19–20; 13:2; 15:28; 20:22–23); and grants assurance (Rom. 8:16; 1 John 3:24; 4:13) and unity (1 Cor. 12:7–21; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 2:18–22; 4:3–6; Phil. 2:1–2). There is continuity but also a more lavish outpouring and a wider ministry in the New Testament.

3. The church of Jesus Christ is a Pentecostal church.

The church was sent to baptize, teach, and disciple in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is the Word of the Spirit and therefore the objective bearer of the Spirit's power, and thus it is the Word of Christ. The Spirit unites people to Christ by and through his Word.

The actions of Ananias and Sapphira in misleading the apostles are described as lying to the Holy Spirit, which brought upon them swift and unmistakable discipline enforced not by the human leaders but by the Spirit himself (Acts 5:1–11). The Spirit disciplines the church. Administrative and judicial discipline and the considered decisions of the Council of Jerusalem are also the decisions of the Spirit (Acts 15:28).

There is a conjunction between the calling, ordaining, and sending of the church at Antioch and the actions of the Spirit (Acts 13:1–7). The Spirit set Saul and Barnabas apart for missionary labors and made this known to the church leaders, who in turn set the two apart by prayer and the imposition of hands and so sent them away, a sending that was ultimately by the Holy Spirit. Church action and action by the Spirit were coordinate. Indeed, throughout Acts the Spirit directs Paul's missionary labors (Acts 16:6 ff.). Paul's apostolic authority is the Spirit's work. Although he has no instructions from Jesus from his earthly ministry on a matter, yet Paul's apostolic advice is of equal weight, since he has the Spirit of God to direct him as an apostle (1 Cor. 7:10–12, 40).³

4. The Holy Spirit brings about our union with Christ in our life history, doing this by grace through faith.

Our faith and all that flows from it in the Christian life is due to the Spirit, who renews us in the image of God and transforms us into Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). Eventually, when Christ returns in glory, we will be like him (1 John 3:1–2). This entire process occurs through faith. Faith is “the principal work of the Holy Spirit,” as Calvin said.⁴ The Spirit unites us to Christ. As a house benefits from electricity when hooked up to the grid, so we benefit from the work of Christ when it becomes ours as the Spirit unites us to him.⁵

Notes:

1. B. B. Warfield, “The Spirit of God in the Old Testament,” in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1952), 154.
2. Warfield, “Spirit of God,” 155–56.
3. H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church: A Study of Christian Teaching in the Age of the Fathers* (1912; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock), 80, cites Tertullian, who remarks on the power of the Holy Spirit in the discipline of the church and on the newness of the New Testament.
4. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.1.4
5. An image used in Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 23.

Signs of the King – Acts 2:37-47

by Timothy Keller

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. ⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. – ACTS 2:37-47

Last week we began a series of messages, of talks, on the church. Have you noticed how often I talk about us launching a church? Why do I like to use that word *launching*? Is it just because I’m a frustrated sailor? No. Actually, I think of a rocket ship, and I think of how important liftoff is, because if you’re aiming at the moon and your rocket ship down here is just a silly millimeter off, it could be thousands of miles off when it gets there.

Therefore, if this church is not going to join the thousands and thousands of cultural institutions that are totally ineffective in this country within just a few years, it is vital we strain every nerve to think about the church aright, to envision it, to see exactly what it is and what it can be. Now last week we said there was a central fact, the most important thing you have to understand if you’re going to understand what the church is. That central fact is the church is the place where God dwells, where God comes down as it were and meets us in all of his transcendent love and light and fire and majesty.

That’s what the Bible says, and the church has known this for years. Not programs. Not busyness. Not work, but that. You know, one of the greatest hymns ever written about the church was written by John Newton. It says,

Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, City of our God!

He’s talking about the church.

He, whose word cannot be broken, Formed thee for his own abode.

The first thing Newton says in that hymn is the church is the place where God dwells. Now this particular passage is very critical because it gives us the birth of the New Testament church. You see, there’s a little group of people. Jesus, when he left, had only left a small handful of people. Peter preaches this remarkable message

on the day in the history of the church we have always called the day of Pentecost, and on that day, Peter preached a message, and the message that formed that church, that gathered those 3,000 souls that first day, was through Jesus Christ you can have the presence of God in your life.

We'll look at that just for a minute because I want to show you that was his message. That's what formed the church. We see that in verses 37–41. That's the message that formed the church. Then in verses 42–47 we see the marks of the life of this early church. In other words, if a group of people actually come together and build their lives on that reality that God is present in the midst, if a group of people come together and actually take that seriously (not cynically) and say, "This is what we're going to build our lives on," the presence of God expresses itself.

There is a cosmic vitality that expresses itself through a church like that, and I want to show you the signs of it. It's right there in verses 42–47. There are five signs of that cosmic vitality. It's the way you can tell whether a church is realizing the presence of God. What we're trying to show and what this passage tries to show is first of all, before we can run off to our busyness and run off to our ministries and our programs, we have to stand before God and realize his presence and know it and yearn for it.

Then it's the presence of God that becomes like the motor or the driveshaft for everything else the church does, and that's what we're going to see. First, *the message that forms the church is that Jesus Christ is the way to know the presence of God.* Secondly, *the five signs of life that flow out of that should characterize every good church.* Let's look at the message and then let's look at those five signs which are the evidences of that kind of vitality.

First, *the message.* In a way we talked about this last week, but I just want to show you again what it is. Peter says to them, "**Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**" He says, "**Repent and be baptized ...**" That is virtually the same thing Jesus said when he came out of the wilderness and first began to preach in Mark 1:15 and said, "**Repent, and believe the gospel.**"

Those two things are always there: repentance and trust. Repent and trust your sins can be put away through Jesus Christ so they are no longer a barrier between you and God. Repent and believe. Those are not two different things; that's one thing. It's repentant faith, turning from your old ways, resting and trusting in Christ, and making him your only hope in life and death.

They are really two sides to the same coin, and that's how you receive Christ as Savior and Lord, through repentance and faith. Obviously, we could spend quite a bit of time talking about repentance and faith, but right now let's move on to how this creates the church. If a person receives Christ as Savior and Lord, Peter says you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now let's take that apart for a moment. Give me a 90-second tangent for some of you.

Even though you have repented and believed, the Holy Spirit comes in as a gift. Your repentance and your faith do not earn the Spirit; it is a gift. Now the only reason I say that is because I continually meet people who don't know where they stand in the Christian faith, and they say, "I know you're not saved by your efforts and your good deeds. You're saved strictly by faith alone, but I don't know whether my faith is good enough. It just doesn't seem to be very strong. It doesn't seem to be very pure."

Repentance and faith receive the gift. Your repentance and faith don't have to be pure enough to earn it. Then it wouldn't be a gift. Let me put it this way. It's the *fact* of your repentant faith, not the purity of it, that brings it in, and anyone who is worried and always saying, "I don't know if I repented well enough. I wonder if I repented well enough." I can clear that up for you right now. You haven't. Nobody has ever repented well enough. Who in the world has ever been sorry enough for the things they've done wrong?

You say, "I don't know whether my faith is good enough." I can clear that up, too. My friends, here is the bad thing. If you're worried about it, there is pride in there. As humble and as despairing as you seem, what you're saying is, "Oh, I have to get good enough. I have to be pure enough. I have to be faithful enough so Jesus Christ can give me his Spirit." My friends, receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is a gift. Eternal life is a gift. The Holy Spirit is a gift. Your faith receives it; it doesn't earn it. It can't. Don't you see?

Now it's the gift of the Holy Spirit I want to look at here for a second. Peter is telling us something I'm afraid most of us here cannot really understand the momentous nature of. (How do you like that for a sentence?) I don't think anybody in this room can understand how momentous a statement this was unless we spend some time reflecting on it. Peter didn't just preach this sermon. Years later, he wrote a couple of epistles which are in the back of this Book. He wrote a couple of letters to some other churches.

In this sermon he says there is a tremendous promise. He says, "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off ..." You can come near to God. You can come near. You're far off. You can come into the presence of God and receive the Holy Spirit. Now he says it a different way in his second epistle (letter) in 1:4, where he says, "Through his great and precious promises, we participate in the divine nature." That's the same thing.

See, what is the Holy Spirit? It's the glory of God. It's the lifeblood of God. I'm sorry. You see, this promise beggars description. It's his very glory, and Peter is saying *that*, through receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, can flood into your life. Now get the hang of this. Remember Moses said, "Show me your glory." What he was saying was, "Oh, Lord, I want your glory to come into my life. I want to see it," and God said, "You can't. It will kill you. Your poor, bitty, little soul would crack under the strain of it, so I'm going to let you see the gleam of my brightness through the back door," in a sense.

He said, "I'll put you in the cleft of the rock, and I'll let my hind parts go by you." We don't know what in the world that means except God was saying to Moses, "Moses, you can't take my glory." When Isaiah got just a glimpse of God in the temple, what did he say? He said, "Woe is me! for I am undone ..." which is a good King James Version way of saying, "I feel unzipped! I feel I'm being unbuttoned. I'm unraveling." Why? He said, "... for mine eyes have seen the King ..." "The King is here, and even getting this close, I feel like I'm coming apart."

The glory of God (his face, his royal presence, his raw presence, what in the Old Testament they called the *shekinah*, the glory cloud of God) dwelt in the Holy of Holies in the center of the tabernacle in the temple behind the veil over the ark of the covenant. Who could get there? Who could go back there? Who could get near the presence of God? Only the high priest, the holiest person (supposedly) in Israel, one day a year on the Day of Atonement after spending days purifying himself in body and soul.

Then he would go back there with a blood atonement, sprinkling incense everywhere so he didn't see anything that might kill him. He had bells on the tassels on his robe so the people outside could hear him moving around so they knew he was still alive. Now why was the presence of God so fatal to people? One of the problems is we have movies, and I know in a way Steven Spielberg wasn't really trying to depict this, but you know in the *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the power of God that comes out of the ark of the covenant is depicted as a completely abstract thing.

You remember, don't you, through great special effects, the nasty Nazis opened the lid and they looked in? If I remember correctly, Harrison Ford and Karen Allen closed their eyes. Isn't that right? You get the impression first of all, because they closed their eyes while the Nazis were looking at it, and secondly, you also get the impression because the Nazis are nasty and because Harrison Ford and Karen Allen were kind of good people, they didn't get melted down the way all the other people did with all those great special effects.

In other words, the ark of the covenant is depicted as a kind of cosmic mouse trap, and the power is abstract. If you push the right buttons and you do the right things, you see, it won't harm you; it will harm somebody else. My friends, that is not at all the way the Bible depicts the glory of God. The glory of God was fatal to people, and the reason it was fatal to people was because of the holiness and sin issues. Maybe the best way to understand it is the old orbit analogy.

God, because he's completely pure, and he's completely holy, and he's completely just, everything he is and does and thinks centers on what is good and what is holy and what is just and what is pure. That's why he does what he does. Now let's think about ourselves for a moment. Remember everything we do centers on ... let's face it ... our happiness and our comfort. We will take the good, the true, and the holy into consideration, but we reject it if it looks like its not comfortable, right?

Let's be honest. What do we center on? Why do we do the things we do? Why do we make the decisions we make? What do we center on? We center on our own comfort and our own happiness, and here is God centering on what is good and what is true and what is right. My friends, when two planets have the same center, you have a solar system, and you have harmony.

When two planets come together and they have two different centers, you have an accident looking for a place to happen. It's inevitable there will be cataclysm, and when a holy God and human beings who make everything revolve around their own pride and themselves ... When a holy God comes into the presence of sinful man, there is trauma. There is clash.

When Moses said, "Show me your glory," God said, "I can't." Even all through the Bible, you see, though Moses *knew* he *needed* the presence of God and we were all built for it, and he knew it would fulfill something deep in every human soul, he couldn't have it. In the Bible, whenever it says, "Come into his presence with singing," we know that was a relative command because the people could *not* come into the presence of God. They could come relatively into the presence of God.

They could come into the outer courts, but nobody could go into the presence of God except that poor high priest with his knees knocking. Then Peter has the audacity to say, "Through his great and precious promises, we are made partakers of the divine nature." Through receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, because he is the *real* High Priest, because he is the *final* sacrifice, when Jesus died that veil was ripped and the barrier between the presence of God and the people was gone because Jesus is the door, and when you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, the very presence of God comes into your life.

The Holy Spirit comes in with all of his unconquerable mirth. Mirth! The Holy Spirit has enough joy in him to set a whole kingdom laughing. Why not? God is the center of joy. The Holy Spirit, with his absolute purity and boundless love and dynamic energy and strength, comes in and we're never the same again. Don't you see this is radical and this is what the church is built on? This is what the people responded to. Now just before we move on, quickly one thing.

You can't have something like that coming into your life without turmoil. See, some of you are fairly new Christians, and that's one of the reasons I'm here in New York to meet people like you. It depends on how new you are. I would say if it's been a few weeks, if it's been a couple of months, somewhere in there you experience the tough side of being a Christian. There are all sorts of tough sides, and I don't have time to go into a catalogue of them now, but some of you are out there saying, "If God is my Savior and if my sins are forgiven and he accepts me and all these great things are true, why are all these problems happening to me?"

Some of you are saying, "If the Holy Spirit has come into my life like this, why does it seem to be taking so long for me to get better? Why in some ways do I feel like I'm actually doing worse? Am I really a Christian?" For something of this kind of power and magnitude to come into your life, it just does not sneak in. It doesn't slip in. If you think of the Christian life as one unbroken, smooth road of peace from here on in, look out.

Suppose we were in the middle of a tremendous heat wave. I mean, we haven't had heat waves this year, but like last year. Worse than last year. Day after day after day of 110 degrees. People are dying. Imagine being in a heat wave like that, and you start to say, "We are going to perish if we don't get a cool, Canadian high."

Then we find out there is one on the way. Well, how will it come and release us and deliver us from this heat? A thunderstorm, right? You see, a cold air mass coming and hitting that heat wave, the only way to move it out before everything clears off and the haze is gone, things get worse before they get better. Before the haze is gone so we can finally see the blue sky, things have to get a lot worse. That's a normal approach.

My friends, when God's presence comes into your life full of selfishness with his love, full of power with your anxiety, there's going to be a clash. It has to happen. There will be, but don't worry. The haze will clear out. That's the only thing I need to tell you. Somebody says, "If God is a loving God, why is it he is showing me so many bad things about my life? Why is it that everything is going like this?" Well, listen, remember who he is. He is light, and he is love, and he is wise, and he is holy.

There is this tremendous quote I got out of C.S. Lewis' book, *The Problem of Pain*, in which he says just be careful when you ask the living God into your life. He says, "In awful and surprising truth, we are objects of his love. You asked for a loving God; you have one. The great spirit [God] you ... invoked ... is present ..." Now listen to every word here. "... not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way, not with the cold philanthropy of a conscientious magistrate ... but [he is] the consuming fire himself, the love that made the worlds, persistent as the artist's love for his work ... as provident and venerable as a father's love for a child, jealous, inexorable, exacting as love between the sexes."

Yes, God has come in with his love. It's a holy love. It's a powerful love, and it's going to renovate you, and it's going to remake you, but nobody ever renovates someplace without a lot of dust and a lot of dirt and a lot of inconvenience, without it getting uglier before it gets more beautiful? Right? That's normal! How can you expect it to be any other way? Trust him, though, you see. You trust in him, of course, but recognize when something like *this* comes into your life, there's going to be a cloud of dust.

Now verses 42–47 tell us these people who took hold of this truth with both hands and said, "All right. We're going to build our lives on this. Though we were far away from God, we can be brought near right into the presence of God and have the Holy Spirit in our lives." I want to show you there are five signs of this vitality. Let me put it this way. Every one of you in this room who has received Christ as Savior and Lord have access to the presence of God when you sit down and pray, when you say, "Because of what Jesus Christ did, O Father, hear my prayer."

You have access to his presence, but the Bible also says, "For where two or three [of you] are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of [you]." What that means, among other things, is when several Christians get together, though they individually have access to the presence of God, the presence of God expresses itself in corporate ways in the corporate life of those people. Here is what they are, five of them, and I want you to keep this in mind.

I'm going to go through them quickly because every one of them at some future date will get an extended treatment. I guarantee you. I want you to see at this point the importance is they all have to be together. Having one or two or three will not do the trick, and I'll explain why. The five things are *teaching, community, social compassion, evangelism, and worship*. Let's go through them quickly.

1. Teaching

It says here in verse 42, *they were devoted to the apostles' teaching*. Devoted. A vital church understands truth is not just a subjective thing. Of course, it's subjective, but we also believe there is a body of truth (the teaching of the apostles and the prophets) deposited here, and that truth not only gives us guidance for every area of our

lives, but the truth isn't an abstract thing. The Bible says about itself that it's alive and active. It's a transforming power that comes in and changes us.

For a church to honor the truth does not just mean people flock to hear the great teacher, nor does it mean the people of the church just run by their Bibles in the morning for five minutes and just expect inspiration to jump out of it onto you somewhere to take you through the day. Rather, it says the people of a church like this are devoted to the apostles' teaching. They devoted themselves, you see. They dug in. They spent the time. They reflected. They thought. They meditated. They wrestled.

They said, "How do I get this truth into my life? What does this truth mean?" You see, they thought about it. One of the hard things to explain in a place like New York, especially in a place like Manhattan, is that wherever God's presence is, there is an insatiable hunger for truth. Now the reason it's harder to show in a college town or a big city is there are a lot of people around who are already predisposed to enjoy reading and studying. You become Christians and you continue to enjoy reading and studying.

It's starkly obvious when you go to a place where people hate reading and studying. When the presence of God comes down in their midst, it's amazing to see the change. I took a church in Virginia that, when I got there, as far as I knew, virtually none of the officers had finished high school. Especially the males in that particular blue-collar, southern community felt readin' and writin' were feminine.

I remember a man who came to Christ just before I got there. He had been an alcoholic. He had been a career army sergeant. He was a tough, rough person. He became a Christian, and this man who had only finished eighth grade (I don't know how in the world he got that far) became hungry to study the Word of God.

He could barely read, and he would spend hours reading a passage, having to look everything up in the dictionary. After a while, he came to me and said, "I want to teach." I said, "I don't know how you're going to do that." He said, "Give me a chance." So we gave him a Sunday school class. His wife told me absolutely for sure that he spent 45 hours a week preparing his lesson. He would spend hours just reading with the dictionary through the Sunday school teacher's guide.

Then he would write out what he was going to say. He would speak it into a tape. He'd take the tape to some friends, and they would listen. He would say, "Now am I pronouncing these words right?" and "What does this word mean?" What did he turn out to be? A good teacher. Nothing spectacular. A mediocre teacher, but it was unbelievable to see what happened in this man's life, and he changed. I remember after being there for nine years, one of the last days I was there, this man came up to me and said something.

He said, "Do you know what? Before you came to this town, before I came under your teaching, I was a racist." Now I had never ever talked to this man. Of course, he was a racist! Everybody in town was a racist, and frankly, I had never talked to this man about it ever. That is one of the last things a blue-collar, Southern male over the age of 50 will ever say. What happened to him? Whenever God is present, the truth shines. Some of you may up till now have been saying, "I don't even know I'm sure what you mean when you talk about access to the presence of God."

Let me tell you what the sign of it is. Let me give you the most common way to experience it only through Jesus Christ, of course. You're reading a passage you've read 100 times before and suddenly it shines like somebody plugged it in and you're looking for the cord. You're saying, "Why didn't I ever see that before?" You see, the truth gets real. Real! When we talk about the presence of God, we mean it gets real. For example, the promise of God's love becomes more real to you than the rejection you're getting in your life, so you're just not walking around with your head hanging down.

The promise of God's protection, the truth of that, becomes more real to you than the things you're afraid of, the threats that are coming to you. Do you see? That's why Peter can say, "Through his great and precious

promises, we participate in the divine nature.” It’s the promises. It’s devoting yourself to the Word. It’s getting and understand the truth. It shines only when God does it. You experience the presence of God when he becomes real to you through the Word, and that’s a sign of the presence of God. That’s the first sign, and that’s a mark of real Christianity. It’s the essence of a real Christian, and it’s the mark of a church like this.

2. Community

It says there they had everything in common and they didn’t claim anything they had was their own. Now I know the example it gives here is economic sharing, giving a lot of money and resources to each other, but let me just say they devoted themselves to fellowship and community. Community exists to the degree people are saying to one another, “What’s mine is yours.” We’re not just talking about money at all. As a matter of fact, you can have communism without any community at all, right?

You can have a forced redistribution of wealth without any community. Community has to do first of all with what is in the heart. For example, in the church if somebody comes to me and says, “Do you know what? I don’t like the way in which you are treating your children.” What if I say, “That’s none of your business?” I have no concept then of community, no concept of what the Bible says the church is. I’m a radical, American individualist, but I have no idea about this, because you see, my sins are your business.

The Bible says, “... *confess your sins to one another* ...” “*Bear one another’s burdens* ...” That means we don’t just share our bucks, though we do. We share our joys. We share our mistakes. We share our sorrows. Now this can be done in a very icky way, and you can very artificially press this kind of community on people. It grows, and it has to grow in an organic, natural way, but I tell you, we in America are absolutely against this. In his book, *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah says the one thing Americans hold dear is the idea I am not accountable to anybody but myself for the meeting of my own needs.

That, my friends, is worldliness. I know many churches have said what worldliness means is, “We don’t smoke, and we don’t chew, and we don’t go with girls who do.” That’s worldliness. My friends, that’s not worldliness. Worldliness is saying, “I don’t want to be accountable to anybody.” The only thing that can really create community is the presence of God. I saw *The Abyss* the other night. It was pretty good. I’m just a frustrated film critic, so I won’t say anything about the movie.

That movie is a typical adventure movie in that you have a bunch of people who, for one reason or another, don’t like each other, but because they go through the same incredible experience that sets them apart from everybody else in the world, by the end they are lifelong pals. It’s like *The Dirty Dozen*. They all hated each other, but then they got on this great mission in the end. It had male bonding stuff. Oh, how great it is. Any two people, no matter how different they are in every other way, who through Jesus Christ have experienced the presence of God, there is community there.

The relationship between two Christians outweighs any other relationship you have on the basis of your race, on the basis of your gender, or on the basis of your social status. You are a Christian first and you’re white second. You’re a Christian first and you’re black second. You’re a Christian first and you’re wealthy or poor second. You’re a Christian first and you’re an American second. Do you see what I’m saying? Community can only be based on the presence of God.

3. Social compassion

It says here these people were unbelievably generous to anybody who was in need. The difference between a real Christian and a moralistic person is not that Christians repent of their sins. My friends, lots of moralistic people repent of their sins. The difference between Christians and non-Christians, the difference between real Christians and moralistic people is Christians also repent of their best deeds.

In other words, they also recognize even the best things they've ever done are filthy rags in God's sight, and I have to rest wholly and completely in what Jesus has done for me. Now if you are a moralist, if you're basically a Pharisee, if you basically believe God saves you and loves you because you're a pretty good person, you're going to look at needy people, and you're going to say, "Pull yourself up by your bootstraps. I did."

If, on the other hand, you know you're a sinner saved by grace, when you look at a person who smells terrible, who has no resources, no mind, nothing left, you say, "I realize I'm looking in a mirror. I realize this is what I look like to God spiritually, and you're generous." Only an encounter with God through Jesus Christ can you have that kind of spirit, and *any* church that understands and realizes the presence of God in its midst is compassionate like that.

4. Evangelism

Notice it says they enjoyed the favor of all the people and they grew every day. Now can I point out to you, though it says the radiance and the responsibility and the beauty of this Christian community was so great that people were attracted to it (they loved it), non-believers said, "What is going on here?" They had the favor of all the people. Don't forget 2 Timothy 3:12. It says, "*All who live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*"

Now somebody is out there saying, "What do you mean, 'Don't forget'? Those two things seem to contradict. How can you keep them together?" It's really pretty simple. Anybody who is living a consistent, Christian walk will polarize people. That means there will be some people who will say, "You are remarkable. You are amazing. You are fascinating to me. I want to talk to you about my problems. I want to find out what's going on in your life. I want to get to know you better." Or you'll have people who are extremely upset with you, offended by you, and angry at you.

You may go through seasons where there is a lot of popularity and seasons where there is persecution. It might be happening at the same time, but only if you are absolutely not living a consistent, Christian life will nobody notice. The fact is, whenever the church is the church, it's getting both: a terrific amount of growth through attraction *and* persecution.

I knew a man who was a college kid when I was a college kid. One summer he was going to work for the post office. He said to me, "The thing I want to know is how can I be a Christian postal worker?" So we sat down and said, "Okay. How do we integrate our Christianity into our postal working service?" We started to say to ourselves, "Okay. Does the Christian put the stamp on any different than a non-Christian?" "No."

We finally figured out all he could do was get in there and do eight hours of a hard day's work. In just one brief summer, he polarized that office because on the one hand he had people saying, "I like your style. I like your hard work. I like your savvy. I like your attitude." Yet, other people were coming and saying, "You might get roughed up if you don't slow down. You're making us look lousy. You're just a kid. You're here for three months. We have to work here all of our lives. Your production is making us look bad. It's putting heat on us. Cut it out!"

He polarized the place just by doing eight hours of good work. What I want to know is why that's not happening to you and why it's not happening to me and why it's not happening to us. All I know is if you're walking the way you ought to walk, there will be that polarizing, and the church will grow.

5. Worship

They praised God in the temple and in their homes. Verse 43 says there was awe, and intimacy and glad, generous hearts. You know, real worship is characterized both by an awe and an intimacy at the same time, not just sober dignity that eventually makes the place seem like a funeral home, and not just "gee, wish, golly, and God's a wonderful guy who makes us feel warm and fuzzy," but both together. There is both an awe and an

intimacy, and the reason for that is God will reveal his face to us as a group when we come together and worship him.

That's not an easy thing to understand, and I can't explain it. All I know is I exist in this entire field of space right here. Six foot four of it and 220 pounds of it, I exist in this whole field of space, but if you come up and try to talk to me, you probably won't talk to the back of my kneecap, will you? Why? Because that's not the way in. *This* is the way in. Isn't that weird? The front of my head is the way in. You're going to talk to the front of my head. You're going to talk to my face, because that's the way to make contact.

God is a spirit. He is everywhere, you see. In fact, he's more than everywhere. It says, "The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you," which is pretty hard to figure out. He's bigger than everywhere. The greatness of God! The place to communicate with him is at his face. How do you find his face? Well, how do you find my face? It's pretty easy. It's up here at about six foot four. How do you find the face of a spirit? He has to reveal it to you, and he promises to reveal it to those in worship who receive Christ as Savior and Lord.

In conclusion, let me just say how can any church be a church like this? The answer is on the one hand, we do have to be careful to balance our programs. Yeah, we do. If you don't have all five of those things, do you realize how bad it can be? It's possible to have social compassion not because of the Spirit of God ... listen to this ... but just out of a pride and a humanism, a pride in human beings. A social compassion like that, which arises out of humanistic pride, will not go along with teaching, and it won't go along with evangelism.

You can have a church or group who loves great teaching and indoctrinating people because it likes tidy systems, and it likes telling people they're wrong, but there won't be a lot of fellowship or celebration in that church. You can find people who love celebration. They love great music. They love to get together, and they say it is worship, but it's probably just an emotional catharsis because there is no truth and teaching in that church. You see what I mean? You can have a church that seems like its full of fellowship and full of community where people love each other because they're lonely, but there is no outreach and there is no social compassion.

What I'm trying to say is only if you have all five is that a sign that the Spirit of God is there, and you have to work for balance in your programs, yeah, but ultimately, my friends, you and I have to create little altars in our own lives for the fire to come down on us if we expect a church to be a big altar on which the fire can fall. That little altar is right there in verse 42. I suggest you circle it. I suggest you take it home with you. It says you have to be devoted to three things. "***They were devoted to the apostles' teaching.***" That's study. "***They were devoted to fellowship.***" That's real communication and accountability to other believers. "***They were devoted to prayer.***"

My friends, if you give those things short shrift, do not expect the fire to come down. In the Old Testament, you built the altar. You put the sacrifice there, and the fire came down, you see. The fire is the reality and presence of God. I have three sons, and I can't spend all of my time in their faces. I'd love to do it. I love at night to climb into their bunk beds, to read them a book, to communicate my undying love and affection, to hug them, to touch them. I can't do that all the time.

I love to buy them gifts, and I love them to hug me. I can't do that all the time, but I do tell them this: "If you listen to me, if you obey me, if you love me, if you follow me, those times will become more and more frequent." God says the same thing to you, and you have to look at your life, and if you say, "This reality is just not part of my understanding, my knowledge at all," dare I say it ... you really have no excuse. There is a three-pronged tripod there. They were devoted to the apostles' teaching, to prayer, and to fellowship.

Look at yourself. Is there anybody in fellowship you are accountable to for your life who you really talk to, not just in general about the weather, but about what God is doing in your life? Do you have anybody like that? Can

you really be said to be devoted to study? Can you really be said to be devoted to prayer? If not, you can forget about access to the presence of God. It's not automatic.

Lastly, if there is anybody in this room who has had a religious experience, has had maybe God answer prayers, has asked God for help in changing some bad habits and you've changed them, and you say, "Well, I think I'm a Christian," let me tell you this: The purpose of Jesus Christ is not just to give you a lift, just to help you overcome your bad habits, just to answer your prayers. He does all that, yes, but the purpose of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to give you something that enables you to stand before God face to face today and on the day of your death. If you don't know you can do that, then you still don't understand what the gospel is.

Jesus Christ, if you repent and believe in him alone and receive him, then you can look at him face to face. To stand in the presence of God, that is what the gospel is. The gospel is not primarily about forgiveness. It's not primarily about good feelings. It's not primarily about power. All those things are byproducts, sparks. It's primarily about the presence of God. Do you know that in your life? Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you this is available, and we ask you would enable every person in here to realize it. Now many of us belong to you, yet we're dry as a bone. We're cold, and we need your fire, and we see there is an altar we have to build. Enable us to build it. Father, there are people here tonight, I believe, I know, who have never actually received you in repentant faith and therefore, do not know.

THE FOURFOLD SYMBOLS OF THE SPIRIT

A rushing mighty wind.' ... Cloven tongues like as of fire.' ... I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh.'—ACTS ii. 2, 3, 17.

Ye have an unction from the Holy One.'—I JOHN ii. 20.

Wind, fire, water, oil,—these four are constant Scriptural symbols for the Spirit of God. We have them all in these fragments of verses which I have taken for my text now, and which I have isolated from their context for the purpose of bringing out simply these symbolical references. I think that perhaps we may get some force and freshness to the thoughts proper to this day [Footnote: Whit Sunday.] by looking at these rather than by treating the subject in some more abstract form. We have then the Breath of the Spirit, the Fire of the Spirit, the Water of the Spirit, and the Anointing Oil of the Spirit. And the consideration of these four will bring out a great many of the principal Scriptural ideas about the gift of the Spirit of God which belongs to all Christian souls.

I. First, a rushing mighty wind.'

Of course, the symbol is but the putting into picturesque form of the idea that lies in the name. Spirit' is breath.' Wind is but air in motion. Breath is the synonym for life. Spirit' and life' are two words for one thing. So then, in the symbol, the rushing mighty wind,' we have set forth the highest work of the Spirit--the communication of a new and supernatural life.

We are carried back to that grand vision of the prophet who saw the bones lying, very many and very dry, sapless and disintegrated, a heap dead and ready to rot. The question comes to him: Son of man! Can these bones live?' The only possible answer, if he consult experience, is, O Lord God! Thou knowest.' Then follows the great invocation: Come from the four winds, O Breath! and breathe upon these slain that they may live.' And the Breath comes and they stand up, an exceeding great army.' It is the Spirit that quickeneth.' The Scripture treats us all as dead, being separated from God, unless we are united to Him by faith in Jesus Christ. According to the saying of the Evangelist, They which believe on Him receive' the Spirit, and thereby receive the life which He gives, or, as our Lord Himself speaks, are born of the Spirit.' The highest and most characteristic office of the Spirit of God is to enkindle this new life, and hence His noblest name, among the many by which He is called, is the Spirit of life.

Again, remember, that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.' If there be life given it must be kindred with the life which is its source. Reflect upon those profound words of our Lord: The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit.' They describe first the operation of the life-giving Spirit, but they describe also the characteristics of the resulting life.

The wind bloweth where it listeth.' That spiritual life, both in the divine source and in the human recipient, is its own law. Of course the wind has its laws, as every physical agent has; but these are so complicated and undiscovered that it has always been the very symbol of freedom, and poets have spoken of these chartered libertines,' the winds, and free as the air' has become a proverb. So that Divine Spirit is limited by no human conditions or laws, but dispenses His gifts in superb disregard of conventionalities and externalisms. Just as the lower gift of what we call genius' is above all limits of culture or education or position, and falls on a wool-stapler in Stratford-on-Avon, or on a ploughman in Ayrshire, so, in a similar manner, the altogether different gift of the divine, life-giving Spirit follows no lines that Churches or institutions draw. It falls upon an Augustinian monk in a convent, and he shakes Europe. It falls upon a tinker in Bedford gaol, and he writes Pilgrim's Progress. It falls upon a cobbler in Kettering, and he founds modern Christian missions. It blows where it listeth,' sovereignly indifferent to the expectations and limitations and the externalisms, even of organised Christianity, and touching this man and that man, not arbitrarily but according to the good pleasure' that is a law to itself, because it is perfect in wisdom and in goodness.

And as thus the life-giving Spirit imparts Himself according to higher laws than we can grasp, so in like manner the life that is derived from it is a life which is its own law. The Christian conscience, touched by the Spirit of God, owes allegiance to no regulations or external commandments laid down by man. The Christian conscience, enlightened by the Spirit of God, at its peril will take its beliefs from any other than from that Divine Spirit. All authority over conduct, all authority over belief is burnt up and disappears in the presence of the grand democracy of the true Christian principle: 'Ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ'; and every one of you possesses the Spirit which teaches, the Spirit which inspires, the Spirit which enlightens, the Spirit which is the guide to all truth. So the wind bloweth where it listeth,' and the voice of that Divine Quickener is,

Myself shall to My darling be Both law and impulse.'

Under the impulse derived from the Divine Spirit, the human spirit listeth' what is right, and is bound to follow the promptings of its highest desires. Those men only are free as the air we breathe, who are vitalised by the Spirit of the Lord, for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there,' and there alone, is liberty.'

In this symbol there lies not only the thought of a life derived, kindred with the life bestowed, and free like the life which is given, but there lies also the idea of power. The wind which filled the house was not only mighty but borne onward'--fitting type of the strong impulse by which in olden times holy men spake as they were "borne onward" (the word is the same) by the Holy Ghost.' There are diversities of operations, but it is the same breath of God, which sometimes blows in the softest pianissimo that scarcely rustles the summer woods in the leafy month of June, and sometimes storms in wild tempest that dashes the seas against the rocks. So this mighty life-giving Agent moves in gentleness and yet in power, and sometimes swells and rises almost to tempest, but is ever the impelling force of all that is strong and true and fair in Christian hearts and lives.

The history of the world, since that day of Pentecost, has been a commentary upon the words of my text. With viewless, impalpable energy, the mighty breath of God swept across the ancient world and laid the lofty city' of paganism low; even to the ground, and brought it even to the dust.' A breath passed over the whole civilised world, like the breath of the west wind upon the glaciers in the spring, melting the thick-ribbed ice, and wooing forth the flowers, and the world was made over again. In our own hearts and lives this is the one Power that will make us strong and good. The question is all-important for each of us, 'Have I this life, and does it move me, as the ships are borne along by the wind?' As many as are impelled by the Spirit of God, they'--they--are the sons of God.' Is that the breath that swells all the sails of your lives, and drives you upon your course? If it be, you are Christians; if it be not, you are not.

II. And now a word as to the second of these symbols--Cloven tongues as of fire'--the fire of the Spirit.

I need not do more than remind you how frequently that emblem is employed both in the Old and in the New Testament. John the Baptist contrasted the cold negative efficiency of his baptism, which at its best, was but a baptism of repentance, with the quickening power of the baptism of Him who was to follow him; when he said, 'I indeed baptise you with water, but He that cometh after me is mightier than I. He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.' The two words mean but one thing, the fire being the emblem of the Spirit.

You will remember, too, how our Lord Himself employs the same metaphor when He speaks about His coming to bring fire on the earth, and His longing to see it kindled into a beneficent blaze. In this connection the fire is a symbol of a quick, triumphant energy, which will transform us into its own likeness. There are two sides to that emblem: one destructive, one creative; one wrathful, one loving. There are the fire of love, and the fire of anger. There is the fire of the sunshine which is the condition of life, as well as the fire of the lightning which burns and consumes. The emblem of fire is selected to express the work of the Spirit of God, by reason of its leaping, triumphant, transforming energy. See, for instance, how, when you kindle a pile of dead green-wood, the tongues of fire spring from point to point until they have conquered the whole mass, and turned it all into a ruddy likeness of the parent flame. And so here, this fire of God, if it fall upon you, will burn up all your

coldness, and will make you glow with enthusiasm, working your intellectual convictions in fire not in frost, making your creed a living power in your lives, and kindling you into a flame of earnest consecration.

The same idea is expressed by the common phrases of every language. We speak of the fervour of love, the warmth of affection, the blaze of enthusiasm, the fire of emotion, the coldness of indifference. Christians are to be set on fire of God. If the Spirit dwell in us, He will make us fiery like Himself, even as fire turns the wettest green-wood into fire. We have more than enough of cold Christians who are afraid of nothing so much as of being betrayed into warm emotion.

I believe, dear brethren, and I am bound to express the belief, that one of the chief wants of the Christian Church of this generation, the Christian Church of this city, the Christian Church of this chapel, is more of the fire of God! We are all icebergs compared with what we ought to be. Look at yourselves; never mind about your brethren. Let each of us look at his own heart, and say whether there is any trace in his Christianity of the power of that Spirit who is fire. Is our religion flame or ice? Where among us are to be found lives blazing with enthusiastic devotion and earnest love? Do not such words sound like mockery when applied to us? Have we not to listen to that solemn old warning that never loses its power, and, alas! seems never to lose its appropriateness: 'Because thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth.' We ought to be like the burning beings before God's throne, the seraphim, the spirits that blaze and serve. We ought to be like God Himself, all aflame with love. Let us seek penitently for that Spirit of fire who will dwell in us all if we will.

The metaphor of fire suggests also--purifying. The Spirit of burning' will burn the filth out of us. That is the only way by which a man can ever be made clean. You may wash and wash and wash with the cold water of moral reformation, you will never get the dirt out with it. No washing and no rubbing will ever cleanse sin. The way to purge a soul is to do with it as they do with foul clay--thrust it into the fire and that will burn all the blackness out of it. Get the love of God into your hearts, and the fire of His Divine Spirit into your spirits to melt you down, as it were, and then the scum and the dross will come to the top, and you can skim them off. Two powers conquer my sin: the one is the blood of Jesus Christ, which washes me from all the guilt of the past; the other is the fiery influence of that Divine Spirit which makes me pure and clean for all the time to come. Pray to be kindled with the fire of God.

III. Then once more, take that other metaphor, I will pour out of My Spirit.'

That implies an emblem which is very frequently used, both in the Old and in the New Testament, viz., the Spirit as water. As our Lord said to Nicodemus: 'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.' The water' stands in the same relation to the Spirit' as the fire' does in the saying of John the Baptist already referred to--that is to say, it is simply a symbol or material emblem of the Spirit. I suppose nobody would say that there were two baptisms spoken of by John, one of the Holy Ghost and one of fire,--and I suppose that just in the same way, there are not two agents of regeneration pointed at in our Lord's words, nor even two conditions, but that the Spirit is the sole agent, and water' is but a figure to express some aspect of His operations. So that there is no reference to the water of baptism in the words, and to see such a reference is to be led astray by sound, and out of a metaphor to manufacture a miracle.

There are other passages where, in like manner, the Spirit is compared to a flowing stream, such as, for instance, when our Lord said, 'He that believeth on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water,' and when John saw a river of water of life proceeding from the throne.' The expressions, too, of pouring out' and shedding forth' the Spirit, point in the same direction, and are drawn from more than one passage of Old Testament prophecy. What, then, is the significance of comparing that Divine Spirit with a river of water? First, cleansing, of which I need not say any more, because I have dealt with It in the previous part of my sermon. Then, further, refreshing, and satisfying. Ah! dear brethren, there is only one thing that will slake the immortal thirst in your souls. The world will never do it; love or ambition gratified and wealth possessed, will never do it. You will be as thirsty after you have drunk of these streams as ever you were before. There is one spring of which if a man drink, he shall never thirst' with unsatisfied, painful longings, but shall never cease to thirst with the longing

which is blessedness, because it is fruition. Our thirst can be slaked by the deep draught of the river of the Water of Life, which proceeds from the Throne of God and the Lamb.' The Spirit of God, drunk in by my spirit, will still and satisfy my whole nature, and with it I shall be glad. Drink of this. Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!'

The Spirit is not only refreshing and satisfying, but also productive and fertilising. In Eastern lands a rill of water is all that is needed to make the wilderness rejoice. Turn that stream on to the barrenness of your hearts, and fair flowers will grow that would never grow without it. The one means of lofty and fruitful Christian living is a deep, inward possession of the Spirit of God. The one way to fertilise barren souls is to let that stream flood them all over, and then the flush of green will soon come, and that which is else a desert will rejoice and blossom as the rose.'

So this water will cleanse, it will satisfy and refresh, it will be productive and will fertilise, and everything shall live whithersoever that river cometh.'

IV. Then, lastly, we have the oil of the Spirit.

'Ye have an unction,' says St. John in our last text, from the Holy One.' I need not remind you, I suppose, of how in the old system, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with consecrating oil, as a symbol of their calling, and of their fitness for their special offices. The reason for the use of such a symbol, I presume, would lie in the invigorating and in the supposed, and possibly real, health-giving effect of the use of oil in those climates. Whatever may have been the reason for the use of oil in official anointings, the meaning of the act was plain. It was a preparation for a specific and distinct service. And so, when we read of the oil of the Spirit, we are to think that it is that which fits us for being prophets, priests, and kings, and which calls us to, because it fits us for, these functions.

You are anointed to be prophets that you may make known Him who has loved and saved you, and may go about the world evidently inspired to show forth His praise, and make His name glorious. That anointing calls and fits you to be priests, mediators between God and man, bringing God to men, and by pleading and persuasion, and the presentation of the truth, drawing men to God. That unction calls and fits you to be kings, exercising authority over the little monarchy of your own natures, and over the men round you, who will bow in submission whenever they come in contact with a man all evidently aflame with the love of Jesus Christ, and filled with His Spirit. The world is hard and rude; the world is blind and stupid; the world often fails to know its best friends and its truest benefactors; but there is no crust of stupidity so crass and dense but that through it there will pass the penetrating shafts of light that ray from the face of a man who walks in fellowship with Jesus. The whole nation of old was honoured with these sacred names. They were a kingdom of priests; and the divine Voice said of the nation, Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm!' How much more are all Christian men, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, made prophets, priests, and kings to God! Alas for the difference between what they ought to be and what they are!

And then, do not forget also that when the Scriptures speak of Christian men as being anointed, it really speaks of them as being Messiahs. Christ' means anointed, does it not? Messiah' means anointed. And when we read in such a passage as that of my text, 'Ye have an unction from the Holy One,' we cannot but feel that the words point in the same direction as the great words of our Master Himself, 'As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.' By authority derived, no doubt, and in a subordinate and secondary sense, of course, we are Messiahs, anointed with that Spirit which was given to Him, not by measure, and which has passed from Him to us. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.'

So, dear brethren, all these things being certainly so, what are we to say about the present state of Christendom? What are we to say about the present state of English Christianity, Church and Dissent alike? Is Pentecost a vanished glory, then? Has that rushing mighty wind' blown itself out, and a dead calm followed? Has that leaping fire died down into grey ashes? Has the great river that burst out then, like the stream from the foot of

the glaciers of Mont Blanc, full-grown in its birth, been all swallowed up in the sand, like some of those rivers in the East? Has the oil dried in the cruse? People tell us that Christianity is on its death-bed; and the aspect of a great many professing Christians seems to confirm the statement. But let us thankfully recognise that we are not straitened in God, but in ourselves.' To how many of us the question might be put: Did you receive the Holy Ghost when you believed?' And how many of us by our lives answer: We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.' Let us go where we can receive Him; and remember the blessed words: If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him'!

Pentecost Was First of the Last Days

May 17, 2018 | [Trevor Laurence](#)

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/pentecost-first-of-the-last-days/>

Ten days removed from Christ's ascension, all the disciples gathered in Jerusalem. Without warning, something like a gusting wind rushes through the house. "Divided tongues as of fire" ([Acts 2:3](#)) appear and rest on each of them.

Pentecost. God's Spirit had arrived in his fullness.

Wind and fire. Cloud and flame. The glory presence that went before and behind in the exodus, that rested over the tabernacle ([Num. 9:18](#)), that filled the temple ([1 Kings 8:10–11](#)), now rests over and fills up God's new dwelling—his people, sin-stained though they are.

The storm of God's presence rushes but doesn't destroy. The fire of God's presence descends but doesn't consume. How can this be? Jesus was destroyed and consumed by God's holy presence at the cross so that God could be present with—take up residence in—his temple people in grace.

In this mysterious moment, the Holy Spirit fills the disciples and miraculously enables them to speak in other languages. Jesus had promised to send the Spirit to empower his church's witness in the world ([Acts 1:8](#)), and on the day of Pentecost, the ascended Lord keeps his word.

Where does this strange moment fit within the story of redemption? How does it tie the old and new testaments together? How should we understand it? We must begin with the audience in attendance on that day.

Babel Undone

Pious Jews from "every nation under heaven" ([Acts 2:5](#)) are in Jerusalem, and they gather around to see the commotion. To their astonishment, these foreigners hear the disciples preaching about God's mighty works in Jesus in their native tongues.

At Babel, God judged and restrained rebellion by confusing languages and dividing the people ([Gen. 11:1–9](#)).

At Pentecost, God forgives rebellion, using various world languages to bring people together in Jesus. The effects of sin are being undone as the Spirit goes forth with the gospel of God's grace in Christ.

Pentecost is a reversal of Babel.

But this is more than the reversal of Babel. It's the restoration of the kingdom. When the Old Testament envisioned the renewal of God's kingdom, it anticipated the day when God would heal the divided people of Israel and unify his kingdom under the Messiah King from David's line ([Ezek. 37:15–28](#)). The fulfillment of Israel's wildest hopes is beginning in an unexpected way as scattered Jews from around the world are united by faith under Christ's kingship. Soon, this restoration will extend to Gentiles as well.

First of Last Days

This multinational collection, perplexed by these strange events, asks precisely the right question: *What does this mean?* Scoffers suggest the disciples may have broken into the wine cellar a bit early, but Peter—recently too afraid to even acknowledge Christ—lifts his voice to answer.

Peter takes the Scriptures his hearers already believe and shows how they point to Jesus as the “yes” to all God's promises. In the process, he gives us a marvelous glimpse into how the apostles—recipients of a post-resurrection lesson in biblical interpretation from Jesus himself ([Luke 24:44](#); [Acts 1:3](#))—understood the Old Testament as finding its ultimate meaning in Christ.

Peter starts with [Joel 2:28–32](#), where the prophet looked forward to the last days when God would grant new-covenant blessings and pour out his Spirit on all his people. No longer will the Spirit only dwell *on* special, anointed leaders. He'll be *with* and *within* young and old, men and women, slave and free—every covenant community member.

The last days Joel anticipated have arrived, and the Spirit the prophet longed for has been given. The God who dwelt *among* in Eden, in the temple, and in Christ will now dwell *within* by his Spirit. The “wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below” ([Acts 2:19](#), citing [Joel 2:30](#)) signal the arrival of the day of the Lord, God's intervention in history for judgment and salvation.

Intriguingly, these wonders and signs match many of the descriptions surrounding Jesus's death and resurrection ([Matt. 27:45–54](#); [28:2](#)). Why? Because the day of the Lord broke into history at the cross when God judged sin and worked salvation for his people. And now in these last days, every person who calls on Christ's name in faith will be blessed with the Spirit and reconciled to God.

David's Prayer, David's Heir

Peter continues with a clear announcement of the gospel: Jesus of Nazareth was crucified and killed by men according to the sovereign plan of God, and he was raised from the dead because death couldn't hold him. Death—part of God's curse on sin—can only stake a legitimate claim on sinners. But God loosed the chains of death around his Son because Jesus was perfectly holy and spotlessly righteous.

Quoting [Psalm 16:8–11](#), Peter makes the staggering claim that David himself, Israel's premier king, anticipated Christ's resurrection. In the psalm, David expressed his hope that God wouldn't abandon *him* to death, but Peter suggests that this hope is realized only in Jesus. David's words pointed past himself to the eternal son God promised would inherit his throne forever.

Though King David died, King Jesus—the true Holy One—overcame the corruption of death in the fullest sense imaginable. David's prayer—“you will not abandon my soul”—is answered in David's heir, the Christ,

who was not abandoned in the grave and in whom David and all who believe God's promises are granted the blessing of indestructible life.

What Did Pentecost Mean?

This Jesus, Peter testifies, was exalted in his ascension to the right hand of God the Father—the symbolic place of absolute power and authority—and he sent the promised Holy Spirit, whose work the Jewish audience has now seen and heard with their own eyes and ears.

So what do the events of Pentecost mean?

Peter used the Scriptures they've believed to interpret the phenomena they've seen. Jesus has indeed risen from the dead and has poured out his Spirit to fill God's new-covenant people, according to the Scriptures:

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. ([Acts 2:36](#))

Pentecost is a redemptive-historical confirmation that Christ is risen and reigning.

Through Peter's preaching, the Holy Spirit performs his life-giving work and cuts people to the heart. If what Peter declares is truly true, what must they do? They must repent—agreeing with God about the sinfulness of their sin and looking in faith to Jesus—and enter the church through the covenant sign and seal of baptism. As rebels repent and are baptized in faith, they are marked as citizens of God's new-covenant community and receive all the blessings God promised, including forgiveness and the gift of the indwelling Spirit.

Peter's assurance that this gospel promise is “for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself,” reverberates with echoes of the Abrahamic covenant ([Gen. 12:1–3; 17:1–8](#)) because God's blessing for families and nations is found in Abraham's greater son.

In one day, the church grew from 120 to 3,000. And while the Spirit's descent at Pentecost is a unique event, the same Spirit who fell at Jerusalem still resides within all God's people, and the same promises Peter announced are still the securing, comforting, and empowering hope of every sinner the Spirit has brought to faith in Christ.

In the Old Testament, the feast of Pentecost celebrated God's faithfulness in giving the harvest. And the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost means the harvest of disciples is only beginning.

What does it mean for us? It means God's Spirit poured out at Pentecost will take our proclamation of God's Word and use it to build the church—just as Jesus promised.

Theological Primer: The Holy Spirit

By Kevin DeYoung

<https://www.knowltonpca.org/newsletter/2018/5/31/theological-primer-the-holy-spirit-by-kevin-deyoung>

Many Christians rarely think about the Holy Spirit. God the Father we know about. God the Son we think about all the time. But God the Holy Spirit? There are fewer songs to him, fewer meditations about him, and fewer churches named after him.

But this may not be altogether a bad thing.

Granted, it is very possible that traditional conservative Christians know too little about, and cherish too lightly, the person and work of the Holy Spirit. But before we pursue this criticism too far, we need to remember that the New Testament itself says a great deal more about Jesus Christ and God the Father than it does about the Spirit. More importantly, we must not forget that the work of the Holy Spirit is first of all to glorify Christ (John 16:14). So whether we realize it or not, we are very intimately connected with the work of the Spirit, because whenever we are drawn to Christ as Savior, led to worship Christ as Lord, made to behold Christ as glorious, we are being operated on by the Holy Spirit.

The focus of most of our churches is on Christ and not the Spirit, because that's the focus of the apostolic gospel, the New Testament, and the Holy Spirit himself! Of course, this is not to suggest that singing to the Holy Spirit or worshiping him is inappropriate. Far from it. Every person of the Trinity is equally glorious and deserving of praise. But Spirit-led worship has at its heart not an emotive experience (though emotions are good) nor a spontaneous feel (though spontaneity isn't bad), but rather a Christ-exalting, cross-focused, word-centered event where the name of Jesus is praised in the power of the Spirit to the glory of God the Father.

A Personal Spirit

On Sunday night I saw a few minutes of the Morgan Freeman Story of God series on the National Geographic channel. It only took a few minutes to hear both a Hindu and a Jew refer to God as a force, a power, or a binding energy. There was no suggestion that God—whether one or many—was a person with whom we could have a relationship. So it bears repeating: the Holy Spirit is not a force or a principle of nature or a part of God or mode of his existence. The Holy Spirit is a person—a teaching (Luke 12:11-12), speaking (Acts 13:2), interceding (Rom. 8:26), grieving (Eph. 4:30) person—distinct from the Father and the Son.

The Spirit is eternal God (Heb. 9:14). He is everywhere, which does not mean the Spirit is everything or in everything, but rather that there is nowhere we can go where the Spirit isn't also present (Psalm 139:7). The Spirit alone knows the mind of God (1 Cor. 2:10-11). The Holy Spirit is fully divine, his name being used interchangeably with the name "God" (Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). The Holy Spirit is active in our salvation along with the Father and the Son (1 Peter 1:1-2). Jesus commands his disciples to be baptized in the name (singular) of all three persons (plural) of the Trinity, underlying the equality of rank, power, and majesty among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while also emphasizing their fundamental unity (Matt. 28:19; cf. 2 Cor. 13:14).

The Holy Spirit is not simply an omnipresent being that is with us in the sense that he is everywhere and so wherever we go there he will be also. The Spirit lives within us (1 Cor. 6:19) and makes his dwelling in our hearts (2 Cor. 1:22; Gal. 4:6). We have fellowship with him (2 Cor. 13:14). This imagery should not be understood spatially as if the Spirit gets his mail delivered in the upper left chamber of that beating muscle in the chest. Rather, the Spirit dwells in us by animating our personality, shaping our character, renewing our minds, and stirring our emotions.

A Beneficial Spirit

There are at least three benefits we experience through work of the Holy Spirit.

The first benefit is that we share in Christ and all his blessings. We too are looked upon with filial favor. Everything Christ accomplished is ours. All he won is ours. The promised inheritance of Abraham is ours (Gal. 3:14). All this and more because we belong to Christ and Christ's blessings belong to us through ministrations of the Spirit.

The second benefit is the Holy Spirit's comfort. Most of us have heard that the Holy Spirit is a Comforter (John 14:16 KJV). Other translations render *paracletos* a "Helper" (ESV), a "Counselor" (NIV), or an "Advocate" (NRSV), but the truth is still there: God comforts his people by the Holy Spirit. This happens in a number of ways. The Spirit may supernaturally strengthen your soul and give you a peace that passes understanding or a calm confidence in the work of the Lord (Acts 9:31). He may also comfort you through other Christians as you share in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit of truth, he will often speak to you through the Word of God, leading you into all truth (John 16:12), encouraging you with the words of Scripture he inspired and now illuminates. He may cause you to remember a precious biblical truth or direct your thoughts to the finished work of Christ or give you eyes to see more clearly the glory of God. The Spirit may comfort you with the gift of assurance so that you more boldly embrace your new identity in Christ and more firmly trust the promise of eternal life.

The third benefit is the Holy Spirit's presence forever. Before studying the Heidelberg Catechism in depth several years ago, I had not really thought about Jesus's promise that the Holy Spirit would be with us forever (John 14:16), but the promise is very good news. In heaven, the Spirit will continue to keep us holy. He will continue to teach us more about the inexhaustible riches of Christ. He will continue to be the personal bond that unites believers in fellowship. And He will continue to minister to us the presence of God the Father and God the Son, who together with the Holy Spirit are Triune God, blessed forevermore, Amen.

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Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13)

Bob Deffinbaugh at <https://bible.org/seriespage/3-pentecost-acts-21-13>

1 Now when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like a violent wind blowing came from heaven and filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And tongues spreading out like a fire appeared to them and came to rest on each one of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them. 5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven residing in Jerusalem. 6 When this sound occurred, a crowd gathered and was in confusion, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7 Completely baffled, they said, “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that each one of us hears them in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and the province of Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own languages about the great deeds God has done!” 12 All were astounded and greatly confused, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13 But others jeered at the speakers, saying, “They are drunk on new wine!” ([Acts 2:1-13](#))¹

Introduction²

In one way, our text in [Acts 2:1-13](#) describes something entirely new and amazing. And yet what we read should not come as a complete surprise. We might compare the Pentecost event to having a birthday. You know that your birthday is coming, and that someone who loves you has a present for you. You are not sure exactly what the present is (although you’ve been told you will really like it), and you don’t know exactly when you will receive it. You know it is something good, and that it is coming soon.

As we approach Luke’s description of the Pentecost event, we should do so fully aware that those who experienced it had been prepared for its arrival, even though they did not know exactly what it would be like. Let us begin by turning to Luke’s Gospel and his words regarding the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist in chapter 3: *15 While the people were filled with anticipation and they all wondered whether perhaps John could be the Christ, 16 John answered them all, “**I baptize you with water, but one more powerful than I am is coming—I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.** 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand to clean out his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his storehouse, but the chaff he will burn up with inextinguishable fire” 21 **Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus also was baptized. And while he was praying, the heavens opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my one dear Son; in you I take great delight”** ([Luke 3:15-17](#), 21-22, emphasis mine).*

There are a couple of things that we should note from this text. The first is that John contrasts his baptism with that of Jesus. John baptized with water, but Jesus would baptize with the Spirit and with fire. Jesus will reinforce these words, affirming what John has said. By inference, it is clear that the baptism of Jesus is vastly superior to that of John, just as Jesus is vastly superior to John.

Second, we have here an account of our Lord’s baptism by John. On the one hand, Jesus identified Himself with John, his baptism, and his message. (After all, John was the prophet who designated Jesus as the promised Messiah.) On the other hand, Jesus was identifying Himself with us, mankind, and our need for a Savior.

What strikes me most about Luke’s account of our Lord’s baptism is that at our Lord’s baptism, God identified Himself with Jesus. In believers’ baptism, the one being baptized identifies himself or herself with Jesus in His saving work – His death, burial, and resurrection. The amazing and perhaps unexpected thing that happened at our Lord’s baptism was that God identified Himself with Jesus. The Father identified Jesus as His beloved Son in whom He was greatly pleased ([Matthew 3:17](#); [Mark 1:11](#); [Luke 3:22](#)). The Spirit identified with Jesus by appearing as a dove who descended upon Him and remained upon Him ([Matthew 3:16](#); [Mark 1:10](#); [Luke 3:22](#)).

You may recall this is how God indicated to John the Baptist that Jesus was the promised Messiah (see [John 1:29-34](#))

I believe it is clear that this is the time when our Lord was endued with power from the Holy Spirit to carry out His earthly ministry. It was after His baptism that Jesus faced Satan in the wilderness and then commenced His ministry, with great power:

14 Then Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and news about him spread throughout the surrounding countryside. 15 He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by all ([Luke 4:14-15](#)).

I believe that the baptism of our Lord is similar to the “baptism” of the church that occurs at Pentecost, but I will take this matter up later in this message. For now, let us observe that our Lord Jesus taught His disciples to pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit, with the assurance that their prayers would be answered: 9 *“So I tell you: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. 11 What father among you, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, although you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, **how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!**”* ([Luke 11:9-13](#), emphasis mine)

Surely we cannot help but see the connection between Pentecost and this text in Luke, in which Jesus assures His disciples that the Father will give the Spirit to those who ask for Him. Does this not explain the connection between [Acts 1:12-14](#) and [Acts 2:1-13](#)?

45 *Then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures, 46 and said to them, “Thus it stands written that the Messiah would suffer and would rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and **repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.** 48 **You are witnesses of these things.** 49 And look, **I am sending you what my Father promised. But stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.**” 50 Then Jesus led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands, he blessed them. 51 Now during the blessing he departed and was taken up into heaven. 52 **So they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple courts blessing God*** ([Luke 24:45-53](#), emphasis mine).

After His resurrection, Jesus appears to His disciples. He explains His death and resurrection as the good news of the gospel, for by trusting in Him men can obtain the forgiveness of sins. He tells His disciples that their mission is to be witnesses to His resurrection and to the good news of the gospel. They are to take the gospel to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. This is Luke’s Great Commission and is very similar to [Acts 1:8](#). Jesus also tells His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they are clothed with power from on high, which occurs at Pentecost. Finally, we are told that the disciples joyfully returned to Jerusalem after His ascension, and there they spent much time in the temple courts, praising God.³

4 While he was with them, he declared, “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait there for what my Father promised, which you heard about from me. 5 For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” 6 So when they had gathered together, they began to ask him, “Lord, is this the time when you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He told them, “You are not permitted to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth” ([Acts 1:4-8](#), emphasis mine).

We have now come to the Book of Acts and to the words which we considered in our previous lesson. Notice that Jesus once again reiterates the instruction not to leave Jerusalem until they have received what the Father promised, and what He had spoken about. I believe that by speaking of “what the Father promised,” our Lord is

probably referring to those Old Testament prophecies which foretold the coming of the Spirit, especially those related to the New Covenant.⁴ When Jesus referred to the Spirit's coming as that "**which you heard about from Me**," I believe that He is speaking of texts such as [John 14-16](#), where Jesus said much to His disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord's words further indicate that the promise of the Father is coming shortly, "**not many days from now**" (verse 5).

Setting the Scene for Pentecost [Acts 2:1](#)

Now when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place ([Acts 2:1](#)).

[Acts 1](#) serves as an introduction to the Book of Acts, as well as an introduction to Pentecost. In [Acts 2:1](#), Luke sets the scene for Pentecost. Notice first of all, how brief his description is. He is informing the reader that it is not an event that has been brought about by the apostles and the other believers, but that Pentecost is the sovereign activity of God. There are, however, several observations worthy of note in this one short verse.

First, the Spirit came upon these saints on the Day of Pentecost, the celebration that came some 50 days after the celebration of Passover.⁵ This was the day God had purposed to fulfill His promise of the Spirit. Thus, there must be a connection between the Old Testament Feast of Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. I will take this matter up later.

Second, I believe that the wording of most translations of verse 1 does not do justice to Luke's carefully crafted account. I prefer the wording of the King James Version or the New King James Version here:

When the Day of Pentecost **had fully come**, they were all with one accord in one place ([Acts 2:1](#), NKJV, emphasis mine).

And when the day of Pentecost **was fully come**, they were all with one accord in one place ([Acts 2:1](#), KJV, emphasis mine).

A marginal note at [Acts 2:1](#) in the NASB informs the reader that the text literally reads, "was being fulfilled." My Greek-English lexicon defines this word, "to arrive as the timely moment for an event to take place."⁶ I am reminded of the statement in [Galatians 4:4](#): *But **when the fullness of the time came**, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law ([Galatians 4:4](#), NAU; emphasis mine).*

*But **when the appropriate time had come**, God sent out his Son, born of a woman, born under the law ([Galatians 4:4](#), NET Bible; emphasis mine).*

*But **when the time had fully come**, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law ([Galatians 4:4](#), NIV; emphasis mine).*

Luke is surely seeking to tell us that the Feast of Pentecost was to find its fulfillment in time, and in the coming of the Holy Spirit during Pentecost at this exact time. It didn't "just happen" on Pentecost; it happened on Pentecost to fulfill its eternally determined destiny.

Third, the setting Luke describes is very basic. He tells us simply that "**they were all together in one place.**"⁷ I think there is a reason for this: Luke is seeking to inform us that the Spirit came upon them because it was the right time (Pentecost was "**fully come**"), and it was the sovereign work of God. They did not bring God down by their actions; God came down upon them unexpectedly.⁸ God does not want to give us the impression that if we simply repeat the same steps they took we can have the same experience. This was all God's doing. As we will see throughout the Book of Acts, God is sovereign. He sovereignly bestows His Spirit on whom He wills:

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in other languages **as the Spirit enabled them** ([Acts 2:4](#), emphasis mine).

Later on, Paul also emphasizes the fact that spiritual gifts are sovereignly bestowed: *It is one and the same Spirit, **distributing as he decides** to each person, who produces all these things* ([1 Corinthians 12:11](#), emphasis mine).

There are two additional indications of God's sovereignty in bestowing the Spirit in close proximity to verse 1. Both of these are found in verse 2. First is the word "**suddenly**": ***Suddenly** a sound like a violent wind blowing came from heaven and filled the entire house where they were **sitting*** ([Acts 2:2](#), emphasis mine).

The Spirit did not come after some agonizing effort on the part of the believers in Jerusalem; He came suddenly, and I think we could infer "unexpectedly." Second, Luke informs us that the Spirit came while they were "**sitting**." Now why would he bother to include such a detail as this? Perhaps it was because one usually sits when he is inactive or at rest. If they were sitting, the inference may be that they were not doing anything to induce the Spirit to come.⁹

The Spirit Arrives [Acts 2:2-4](#)

2 Suddenly a sound like a violent wind blowing came from heaven and filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And tongues spreading out like a fire appeared to them and came to rest on each one of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them ([Acts 2:2-4](#)).

I would first like to point out the brevity of this account. There is no emphasis on the sensational, no lengthy or embellished description of the unusual phenomenon. Nothing is said about how those on whom the Spirit descended felt. The emphasis will fall on those who witnessed this event, and on the occasion it brought for the proclamation of the gospel. Put differently, the spectacular events were not primarily for the benefit of the believers, but for the edification of those who witnessed this miraculous moment. I am reminded of Paul's words in [1 Corinthians 14](#): *What should you do then, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each one has a song, has a lesson, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. **Let all these things be done for the strengthening of the church*** ([1 Corinthians 14:26](#), emphasis mine).

What is done in the gathering of the church should be for the glory of God ([1 Corinthians 10:31](#); [Colossians 1:18](#)), and for the edification of the saints ([1 Corinthians 14:26](#)).

In addition to the brevity of this account, take note of its uniqueness. Nothing like this has ever happened before. While a few similar incidents are described later in the Book of Acts, only here do we read of the "**sound of a violent wind**" and the appearance of something like tongues of fire being distributed on those present. Only here is there a large gathering of devout Jews from various parts of the world. Only here do those looking on hear the praises of God in their own mother tongue.

An auditory and a visual manifestation accompany the filling of the Spirit. In both cases, Luke is clear to indicate that it is not a literal wind or a literal fire. It is a very loud sound that is something like a violent wind. It is something like tongues made of fire. But it is neither wind nor fire, literally, so far as the account informs us.

The Gulf Coast of the United States recently experienced two major hurricanes. The news media coverage included the attempt of some to describe the sound and the sights of these disastrous storms. There was no way to adequately describe them. Someone might liken the howling winds to the sound of a freight train, but this cannot do justice to the actual event. So Luke's account is an attempt to describe the awesome sound that drew

people from all over the city of Jerusalem. (So far as I can tell, the appearance of “tongues like fire” was only seen by those on whom the Spirit descended. It would seem that those who spoke with tongues left their original location in the “**house where they were sitting**” and went outside, where the crowds had gathered.)

The question is, “What do these phenomenon symbolize?” What is the meaning of these symbols? We should begin by pointing out that in both Hebrew and Greek (the languages in which most of the Old and New Testaments were written) the word for “**spirit**” is also the word for “wind.” Wind is often a symbol associated with the Spirit of God: *Now the earth was without shape and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the watery deep, but the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the water* ([Genesis 1:2](#)).

*1 The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the **Spirit of the Lord** and placed me in the midst of the valley, and it was full of bones. 2 He made me walk all around them; there were many bones in the valley and they were very dry. 3 He said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I said to him, “Sovereign Lord, you know.” 4 Then he said to me, “Prophecy over these bones, and tell them: ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. 5 This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: Look, I am about to infuse **breath** into you and you will live. 6 I will put sinews on you and flesh over you and will cover you with skin; I will put **breath** in you and you will live. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’” 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. There was a sound when I prophesied—a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8 I saw on them sinews and flesh, and skin covered over them from above, but there was no **breath** in them. 9 He said to me, “Prophecy to the **breath**, prophecy, son of man, and say to the **breath**: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: **Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these corpses so that they may live.**’” 10 So I prophesied as I was commanded, and the **breath** came into them; they lived and stood on their feet, an extremely great army. 11 Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are all the house of Israel. Look, they say, ‘Our bones are dry, our hope has perished; we are cut off.’ 12 Therefore prophecy, and tell them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Look, I am opening your graves and will raise you from your graves, my people. I will bring you to the land of Israel. 13 Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and raise you from your graves, my people. 14 **I will place my Spirit in you and you will live; I will give you rest in your own land. Then you will know that I am the Lord—I have spoken and I will act, declares the Lord**’” ([Ezekiel 37:1-14](#), emphasis mine).*

*3 Jesus replied, “I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” 4 Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother’s womb and be born a second time, can he?” 5 Jesus answered, “I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born of water and **spirit**, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the **Spirit** is **spirit**. 7 Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must all be born from above.’ 8 **The wind blows wherever it will, and you hear the sound it makes, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit**” ([John 3:3-8](#)).*

It would seem, therefore, that the sound like a violent wind signaled the descent of the Spirit in a mighty way. Luke is careful to inform us that the sound like a mighty rushing wind came *from heaven*. In Luke’s account of the baptism of our Lord, he is careful to tell us that the heavens were opened, and the inference is clear that the dove that descended came from heaven, to rest and abide on the Lord Jesus. So, too, the words of the Father came *from heaven*. All of this is to make it very plain that what happened at our Lord’s baptism and what happened at Pentecost originated with God.

Fire is frequently a symbol of God’s presence. We see it when Moses encounters the burning bush in [Exodus 3](#). We see it again with the fire at Mount Sinai in [Exodus 19:18](#). We see it in the pillar of fire that accompanied the Israelites ([Exodus 13:21ff.](#)). From the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah ([Genesis 19:24](#)), we see that fire is also a means of divine judgment (see also [2 Kings 1](#)). That is how John the Baptist seems to think of our Lord’s baptism of fire, at least in part: 11 “I baptize you with water, for repentance, but the one coming after me is more powerful than I am—I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy

Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clean out his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the storehouse, but the chaff he will burn up with inextinguishable fire” ([Matthew 3:11-12](#)).

As I was studying this text, a passage in [James 3](#) came to mind, which might be related: 1 *Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, because you know that we will be judged more strictly. 2 For we all stumble in many ways. If someone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect individual, able to control the entire body as well. 3 And if we put bits into the mouths of horses to get them to obey us, then we guide their entire bodies. 4 Look at ships too: Though they are so large and driven by harsh winds, they are steered by a tiny rudder wherever the pilot’s inclination directs. 5 **So too the tongue is a small part of the body, yet it has great pretensions. Think how small a flame sets a huge forest ablaze. 6 And the tongue is a fire!** The tongue represents the world of wrongdoing among the parts of our bodies. It pollutes the entire body and sets fire to the course of human existence—and is set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of animal, bird, reptile, and sea creature is subdued and has been subdued by humankind. 8 But no human being can subdue the tongue; it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison* ([James 3:1-8](#), emphasis mine).

The human tongue is a reflection of what is in our hearts: 33 *“Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is known by its fruit. 34 Offspring of vipers! How are you able to say anything good, since you are evil? **For the mouth speaks from what fills the heart.** 35 The good person brings good things out of his good treasury, and the evil person brings evil things out of his evil treasury. 36 I tell you that on the day of judgment, people will give an account for every worthless word they speak. 37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned”* ([Matthew 12:33-37](#), emphasis mine).

But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these things defile a person ([Matthew 15:18](#), emphasis mine).

Is it not significant that apart from divine intervention the human tongue is a destructive fire, but once the heart is renewed and the Spirit empowers the tongue, it becomes an instrument of salvation? Thus, tongues of fire seem to symbolize the tongues of the apostles, empowered by the Spirit, which speak of the glory of God, and this leads to the conversion of thousands.

We should take note that the “**tongues**” spoken here are languages unknown to the speakers, but which are the native languages of the hearers. I have tried to mentally picture what must have taken place at Pentecost. The awesome noise (like a violent wind) attracted the crowds. They heard those who were empowered by the Spirit speaking in various foreign languages. I can imagine individuals hearing their own native tongue somewhere in the crowd, and after a search, finding the speaker. I can likewise imagine the speaker, wondering what he is saying. Since they could communicate in a common tongue (Aramaic or Greek?), they could discuss what was being said, and thus the hearer could inform the speaker about what he was saying, and even the language in which it was spoken. What a wonder that must have been for both speaker and hearer.

Audience Response [Acts 2:5-13](#)

5 Now there were **devout Jews from every nation under heaven residing in Jerusalem.** 6 When this sound occurred, a crowd gathered and was in confusion, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7 Completely baffled, they said, “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that each one of us hears them in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and the province of Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them **speaking in our own languages about the great deeds God has done!** 12 All were astounded and greatly confused, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13 But others jeered at the speakers, saying, “They are drunk on new wine!” ([Acts 4:1-13](#), emphasis mine)

We should begin by taking note of the emphasis Luke gives to the audience and to their response. This section ([Acts 2:5-13](#)) is considerably larger than the setting ([Acts 2:1](#)) and the spectacular phenomenon ([Acts 2:2-4](#)). The interpretation of these things, contained in Peter's sermon ([Acts 2:14-36](#)), is even larger. This should serve as an indication of where Luke wants to put the emphasis.

I must confess these verses are perplexing to me. Where did all these “**devout Jews**” come from? Where were these many “**devout Jews**” in the Gospels? Why did they not protest when Jesus was on trial? And yet Luke writes that there were devout Jews from every nation residing in Jerusalem. The term Luke employs to refer to these “**devout Jews**” is not the term used for Gentile proselytes – Gentile converts to Judaism – folks like Cornelius ([Acts 10:1-2](#)) or the Ethiopian eunuch ([Acts 8:26-27](#)). Only Luke uses this term, which is found four times in the New Testament. In addition to our text ([Acts 2:5](#)), it is found in [Luke 2:25](#), where we are introduced to Simeon. It is also employed to designate those who came forward to bury Stephen ([Acts 8:2](#)). Finally, it is used of Ananias, who was sent to speak to Saul (Paul) at the time of his conversion, as recorded in [Acts 22:12](#).

So where did these “**devout Jews**” come from? Where were they before this? Some of them were probably devout Jews who made their way from distant lands to come to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Pentecost (see [Acts 20:16](#)). I suppose that some might have come for Passover and stayed on until Pentecost. We know that many did make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the feasts, especially the three mandatory feasts (see [Exodus 34:23-24](#)):

“The Passover festival at Jerusalem in the days before the temple was destroyed was an impressive occasion. Perhaps the only comparable event in the modern world is the annual Hajj to Mecca. From all over the Eastern Mediterranean world, wherever Jews had settled or foreigners had embraced the Jewish religion, they came each year. Nobody knows exactly how many came. Ancient reports range from half a million to twelve million! A more conservative modern estimate reckons that Jerusalem, quite a small town by modern standards (perhaps 30,000 inhabitants), was **swollen to six times its normal population at Passover time**. The city itself could not hold them, and they filled the surrounding villages, while large numbers set up tents outside the city” (emphasis mine).¹⁰

It seems to me that this was a period of great messianic expectation. The disciples kept pressing Jesus about how soon the kingdom of God would be inaugurated (see [Luke 21:5-7](#); [Acts 1:6](#)). Others must have sensed that the time was nearing as well. Perhaps there were many who, sensing that that kingdom was near, determined to be in Jerusalem, where such things would commence.

Think, too, of the things which had taken place in recent times. Surely word must have gotten out about the birth of Jesus and about the magi who came from afar to worship Him ([Matthew 2:1ff.](#)). Then John the Baptist came, promising that Messiah would soon appear ([Matthew 3:1-2](#)). He drew crowds, even in the wilderness. Jesus then commences His public ministry, which is authenticated by many miracles ([Matthew 4:23-25](#)). For three years, His ministry continues. His appearances in Jerusalem create a considerable stir. Then Jesus is crucified as a criminal. That would seem to be the end it all, but it is not so.

Our Lord's death was far from typical. Something about His death caused those who witnessed it a great deal of distress:

47 Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he praised God and said, “Certainly this man was innocent!” 48 And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts ([Luke 23:47-48](#)).

At the time of His death, a number of very unusual things occurred, things which could not be quickly and easily explained away:

50 Then Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and gave up his spirit. 51 Just then the temple curtain was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks were split apart. 52 And tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had died were raised. 53 (They came out of the tombs after his resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.) 54 Now when the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and what took place, they were extremely terrified and said, “Truly this one was God’s Son!” ([Matthew 27:50-54](#))

Even the unusual death and burial of Judas, who betrayed Jesus by handing Him over to the authorities, caught the attention of those in Jerusalem:

(This became known to all who lived in Jerusalem, so that in their own language they called that field Hakeldama, that is, “Field of Blood.”) ([Acts 1:19](#))

Messianic expectation was at an all time high. Word about Jesus had spread abroad. Surely the “**devout Jews**” heard of such things, and just as surely, they would have made every effort to relocate to Jerusalem, hoping to be on hand when the kingdom of God was inaugurated.

Here, as before, the response of the audience was mixed. The “**devout Jews**” sensed that there was spiritual significance to these events, and they sought to know what it was: “**What does this mean**” (verse 12)? But others dismissed these miraculous events as the babblings of those who were drunk: “**They are drunk on new wine!**” (verse 13)

I am somewhat inclined to think that those who dismissed this great miracle as the result of excessive drinking were mainly “native Hebrews” (see [Acts 6:1](#)), while those who were sincerely seeking to discover the meaning of these events were primarily Hellenistic Jews. The native Hebrews would have had more exposure to Jesus, and thus their rejection of Him would be more culpable. The Hellenistic Jews, however, would not have seen as much evidence of our Lord’s identity as Messiah. More than this, the native Hebrews would likely not know the foreign languages spoken by the Spirit-empowered apostles, while the Hellenistic Jews would recognize their native tongue spoken flawlessly by Galileans (those not considered the educated elite, and those with the strongest accent).

Conclusion

As we seek to conclude this message, let us consider what Pentecost means. In the following verses of [Acts 2](#), Peter will explain the meaning of Pentecost for those who witnessed it. These were folks who needed to place their trust in Jesus as the promised Messiah. But Luke wrote the Book of Acts for folks like us, many of whom have trusted in Jesus. What is the meaning of Pentecost for us? I will attempt to explore the meaning of Pentecost for us by examining from three dimensions:

- (1) Its similarities to the baptism of our Lord by John.
- (2) Its relationship to the Great Commission.
- (3) Its relationship to the Feast of Pentecost.

The Baptism of Jesus and the Baptism at Pentecost

21 Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus also was baptized. And while he was praying, the heavens opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my one dear Son; in you I take great delight” ([Luke 3:21-22](#)).

Consider the similarities between our Lord’s baptism by John and the baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. In [Luke 3](#), the Spirit comes upon Jesus after He has been baptized by John and while He is praying. In Acts, the apostles and others have also been praying, and the Spirit comes upon them. In Luke, a voice (the voice of God

the Father) comes from heaven; in [Acts 2](#), a great noise comes from heaven. In Luke, the Spirit comes in the form of a dove and rests upon Jesus. In [Acts 2](#), the Spirit's coming is seen in the likeness of tongues of fire, which come upon all those gathered together. The coming of the Spirit upon Jesus in [Luke 3](#) is the event that preceded the commencement of our Lord's ministry, a ministry which was marked by manifestations of power. In [Acts 2](#), Pentecost is the event that preceded the going forth of the apostles in power, as they proclaimed the gospel.

I would like to suggest that the baptism of our Lord in [Luke 3](#) is essential and foundational to our understanding Pentecost. In our Lord's baptism, Jesus certainly identified Himself with John, his ministry, and his message. Further, in our Lord's baptism, He identified Himself with lost sinners – He identified Himself with us. But this is not where I see the emphasis falling. At the baptism of Jesus, we see God identifying Himself (Father and Spirit) with the Son, and with His ministry. We see that it is from this point on that Jesus is endowed with power from on high to conduct His earthly ministry.

When we come to Pentecost in [Acts 2](#), we see a similar event taking place with our Lord's earthly body, the church. At Pentecost, God identifies Himself with the church, the body of Christ. It is one thing to identify ourselves with Christ (which we do in believer's baptism). It is another thing for us to claim that God is with us. (Many are those corrupt governments and rulers who have claimed God was with them in their evil causes.) But it is a most unusual thing when God personally identifies Himself with us. That is what He has done at Pentecost. God identified Himself with the church, and specifically with the apostles. The things our Lord Jesus began to do and to teach ([Acts 1:1-2](#)), He continued to do and to teach through His apostles. Just as Jesus did not begin His public ministry until the Father identified Himself with Him by bestowing His Spirit on Him, so the apostles were told to wait until He identified Himself with them at Pentecost.

I do not think that we fully appreciate what it meant for God to identify Himself with the church. This is a distinctly New Covenant event. I am reminded of the events of Exodus in chapters 32-34. While Moses was on the mountain, receiving the Ten Commandments in stone, the Israelites are down below (in full view of the manifestations of God's presence on the mountain) worshipping the idol they had instructed Aaron to fashion for them. The initial issue was whether or not God would wipe out this entire nation and raise up a new nation through Moses ([Exodus 32:7-14](#)). Moses successfully (humanly speaking) interceded for the nation, and God spared them. Now, the issue was whether God would be present with His people as they went forward to possess the land of Canaan:

1 And the Lord said to Moses, "Go up from here, you and the people whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.' 2 And I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite. 3 Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey. **But I will not go up among you, for you are a stiff-necked people, and I might destroy you on the way**" ([Exodus 33:1-3](#), emphasis mine).

Once again it was through the intercession of Moses that God promised to go with His people:

12 Then Moses said to the Lord, "See, you have been saying to me, 'Bring this people up,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. But you said, 'I know you by name, and also you have found favor in my sight.' 13 And now, if I have found favor in your sight, show me your way, that I may know you, that I may continue to find favor in your sight. And see that this nation is your people. 14 And he said, "My presence will go with you,¹¹ and I will give you rest." 15 And he said to him, "If your presence does not go with us, do not take us up from here. 16 **For in what way will it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we will be distinguished, I and your people, from all the people who are on the face of the earth?**" 17 And the Lord said to Moses, "**I will do this thing also that you have spoken, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name**" ([Exodus 33:12-17](#), emphasis mine).

God did go with His people. According to Paul, even our Lord Jesus was present, although not recognized as such ([1 Corinthians 10:4](#)). But God was not intimately indwelling His people. There were always barricades, always barriers which separated men from God. While He was with His disciples, our Lord spoke of a time in the near future when He would dwell within His disciples in an entirely new and much more intimate way:

15 “If you love me, you will obey my commandments. 16 Then I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it does not see him or know him. But you know him, **because he resides with you and will be in you**. 18 “I will not abandon you as orphans, I will come to you. 19 In a little while the world will not see me any longer, but you will see me; because I live, you will live too. 20 **You will know at that time that I am in my Father and you are in me and I am in you**. 21 The person who has my commandments and obeys them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will reveal myself to him” ([John 14:15-21](#), emphasis mine).

From Pentecost on, God has come to dwell in His people, manifesting His person and presence in a way that is more intimate than we ever find in the Old Testament. God now identifies Himself with His people in a most intimate way. This is only possible because our sins have been dealt with on the cross of Calvary. Pentecost can come because our Passover has been sacrificed:

Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch of dough—you are, in fact, without yeast. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed ([1 Corinthians 5:7](#)).

Pentecost and the Great Commission

18 Then Jesus came up and said to them, “**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me**. 19 Therefore go and **make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, **I am with you always, to the end of the age**” ([Matthew 28:18-20](#), emphasis mine).

44 Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.” 45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures, 46 and said to them, “Thus it stands written that the Messiah would suffer and would rise from the dead on the third day, 47 **and repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem**. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And look, **I am sending you what my Father promised. But stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high**” ([Luke 24:44-49](#), emphasis mine).

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth” ([Acts 1:8](#), emphasis mine).

In the Great Commission of [Matthew 28:18-20](#), Jesus claims all authority. He commands His disciples to make disciples of all nations, and He promises to be with them always, to the end of the age. At Pentecost, the power and authority of God are bestowed upon the disciples in the coming of the Holy Spirit. His presence, through the Spirit, is assured until this age is past.

In both Luke and Acts, we see that our Lord promised power through the coming of the Holy Spirit, with the result that the gospel would be proclaimed to all the earth, beginning at Jerusalem. Is it not striking that our Lord has orchestrated Pentecost in such a way that (so to speak) all the nations of the earth are present and represented by those who were dwelling in Jerusalem when the Spirit was bestowed on the church? God has seen to it that the first fruits of His sovereign purposes are harvested on the very day that the Spirit is given to the church.

Pentecost and the Feast of Pentecost

It is my understanding that God purposed to send His Spirit to the church during the Feast of Pentecost because this Old Testament feast foreshadowed Pentecost. Paul calls attention to this relationship between Old Testament institutions and New Testament realities in [Colossians 2](#):

16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you with respect to food or drink, or in the matter of a feast, new moon, or Sabbath days— 17 **these are only the shadow of the things to come, but the reality is Christ!** ([Colossians 2:16-17](#), emphasis mine)

The writer to the Hebrews says the same thing:

For the law possesses a shadow of the good things to come but not the reality itself, and is therefore completely unable, by the same sacrifices offered continually, year after year, to perfect those who come to worship ([Hebrews 10:1](#), emphasis mine).

Let us take note of these Old Testament texts which speak of the Feast of Pentecost:

You are also to observe the **Feast of Harvest**, the firstfruits of your labors that you have sown in the field, and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year when you have gathered in your labors out of the field ([Exodus 23:16](#), emphasis mine).

22 And you must observe **the Feast of Weeks**—the firstfruits of the harvest of wheat—and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year. 23 At three times in the year all your men must appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel ([Exodus 34:22-23](#), emphasis mine).

11 And he must wave the sheaf before the Lord to be accepted for your benefit—on the day after the Sabbath the priest is to wave it. . . . 15 **“You must count for yourselves seven weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day you bring the wave offering sheaf; they must be complete weeks. 16 You must count fifty days—until the day after the seventh Sabbath—and then you must present a new grain offering** to the Lord. 17 From the places where you live you must bring two loaves of bread for a wave offering; they must be made from two tenths of an ephah of fine wheat flour, **baked with leaven**, as first fruits to the Lord. 18 Along with the loaves of bread, you must also present seven flawless yearling lambs, one young bull, and two rams. They are to be a burnt offering to the Lord along with their grain offering and drink offerings, a gift of a soothing aroma to the Lord. 19 You must also offer one male goat for a sin offering and two yearling lambs for a peace offering sacrifice, 20 and the priest is to wave them—the two lambs—along with the bread of the first fruits, as a wave offering before the Lord; they will be holy to the Lord for the priest” ([Leviticus 23:11, 15-20](#), emphasis mine).

26 “Also, on **the day of the first fruits**, when you bring a new grain offering to the Lord during your Feast of Weeks, you are to have a holy convocation. You must do no ordinary work” ([Numbers 28:26](#), emphasis mine).

9 You must count seven weeks; you must begin to count them from the time you begin to harvest the standing grain. 10 Then you are to celebrate the **Festival of Weeks** before the Lord your God with the voluntary offering that you will bring, in proportion to how he has blessed you. 11 **You shall rejoice before him**—you, your son, your daughter, your male and female slaves, the Levites in your villages, the resident foreigners, the orphans, and the widows among you—in the place where the Lord chooses to locate his name ([Deuteronomy 16:9-11](#), emphasis mine).

We can see that the Feast of Pentecost was known by several names: the “**Feast of Harvest**” ([Exodus 23:16](#)), the “**Festival (or Feast) of Weeks**” ([Exodus 34:22](#); [Deuteronomy 16:10](#)), and the “**day of the first fruits**” ([Numbers 28:26](#)).

The Jewish feasts are observed according to the Jewish calendar. As many know, the Jewish calendar is very different from our own.¹² The first spring holiday is that of Passover (see [Exodus 12:1-14](#); [Leviticus 23:5](#)). Passover commemorates God’s deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage at the exodus. Passover recalls the ten plagues, the observance of the first Passover meal (by means of which the first born males were spared), and the crossing of the Red Sea. Passover commences on the 14th day of the first month of Abib, which falls in our months of March or April. The day after Passover, the 15th day of the month, was the beginning of a one week celebration of the “**Feast of Unleavened Bread**” ([Exodus 12:15-20](#); [13:8-9](#); [Leviticus 23:6-8](#)). All leaven was to be removed for a period of one week. One of the seven days of the “**Feast of Unleavened Bread**” would naturally be a Sabbath. The day following this Sabbath there was to be the celebration of the wave offering of Israel’s “**First Fruits**” ([Leviticus 23:9-14](#)). The first sheaf of the new spring barley crop was brought to the priest who waved this offering before the Lord.

The Feast of Pentecost (or, more commonly in Old Testament terms, the “**Feast of Weeks**”) was to be celebrated 50 days after the offering of the first fruits. In this way, we can see that Pentecost followed Passover, but was actually 50 days after the offering of first fruits. It occurs in the third month of the Jewish calendar, which would be during the months of May or June on our calendar.

There are several things I believe to be significant about this holiday which serve to foreshadow the Pentecost of [Acts 2](#). First of all, Pentecost marks the transition from Israel’s barley harvest to her wheat harvest. If I understand correctly, the wheat crop would ripen just as the barley harvest has ended. Thus, it marked the transition from harvesting barley to harvesting wheat. Wheat appears to be regarded as the more highly prized crop. Is this somehow a fulfillment of our Lord’s promise to His disciples?

12 I tell you the solemn truth, the person who believes in me will perform the miraculous deeds that I am doing, and will perform greater deeds than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the [Son. 14](#) If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. 15 “If you love me, you will obey my commandments. 16 Then I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it does not see him or know him. But you know him, because he resides with you and will be in you. 18 “I will not abandon you as orphans, I will come to you ([John 14:12-18](#), emphasis mine).

Whatever the “harvest” had been during the life and ministry of our Lord, it would suddenly increase, beginning with Pentecost.

Second, Pentecost was unique in that the grain offering was in the form of two loaves,¹³ both of which were made with leaven ([Leviticus 23:17](#)). What a contrast to Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, where no leaven was tolerated! What has happened so that the Feast of Pentecost actually requires bread made with leaven? How can that which is leavened be presented to God as a sacrifice?

I’m inclined to see the interpretation in terms of the sequence of spring holidays we have seen thus far. Passover clearly anticipated the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and His saving work on the cross of Calvary. He is our Passover Lamb ([1 Corinthians 5:7](#)). The Feast of Unleavened Bread follows Passover, and all leaven must be removed. The death of our Lord Jesus at Calvary removes the guilt of our sins, and thus we must come to hate sin and desire that it be put far from us:

6 Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast affects the whole batch of dough? 7 Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch of dough—you are, in fact, without yeast. For Christ, our Passover

lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 So then, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of vice and evil, but with the bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth ([1 Corinthians 5:6-8](#)).

Like the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the offering of Israel's first fruits followed shortly after the observance of the Passover meal. The presentation of the first fruits always occurred on the day after Sabbath, or Sunday. Sunday after Passover was also the day our Lord Jesus rose from the dead, the first fruits from the dead ([1 Corinthians 15:20](#)). Fifty days later, Israel celebrated the Feast of Pentecost. This was the end of the barley season (the Old Covenant?) and the beginning of the wheat harvest (the New Covenant?). It was the time when God identified Himself with the church, the time when He endowed the saints with power so that they could carry out the Great Commission. It was the time when God came to indwell His saints in a way that was more intimate than any saint had ever experienced it. It was the time, thanks to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, when God could now indwell those who were not yet free from sin and its corrupting influences. God dwells among and in His people, sinful though they will be, because of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

Matthew's Gospel began by telling us that in Jesus, God is with us:

20 When he had contemplated this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." 22 This all happened so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled: 23 "Look! The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and **they will call him Emmanuel,**" which means "**God with us**" ([Matthew 1:20-25](#), emphasis mine).

When the Gospel of Matthew ends with the Great Commission, we find these words of our Lord, reassuring His disciples that He will be with them always, to the end of the age:

18 Then Jesus came up and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. **And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age**" ([Matthew 28:18-20](#), emphasis mine).

What does Pentecost mean to us? The story of Pentecost in [Acts 2](#) tells us how our Lord is now present with His church – through the Holy Spirit, whom He has sent. Pentecost assures us that God is present with His people, even though we are not yet sinless. We are forgiven sinners, who will one day be freed from the suffering and groaning that is the result of sin ([Romans 8:18-25](#)). But through the atoning work of Christ and the abiding of the Spirit, God is with us in a way that no Old Testament saint ever knew. He is with us, not only to teach, comfort, and guide us, but also to empower us to carry out the Great Commission. What news could be better than this? To God be the glory.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the NET Bible. The NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION, also known as THE NET BIBLE, is a completely new translation of the Bible, not a revision or an update of a previous English version. It was completed by more than twenty biblical scholars who worked directly from the best currently available Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. The translation project originally started as an attempt to provide an electronic version of a modern translation for electronic distribution over the Internet and on CD (compact disk). Anyone anywhere in the world with an Internet connection will be able to use and print out the NET Bible without cost for personal study. In addition, anyone who wants to share the Bible with others can print unlimited copies and give them away free to others. It is available on the Internet at: www.netbible.org.

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material presented herein to be true to the teaching of Scripture, and desires to further, not restrict, its potential use as an aid in the study of God's Word. The publication of this material is a grace ministry of Community Bible Chapel.

³This qualifies our understanding of [Acts 1:12-14](#) (and what I said of these verses in my previous lesson). While the disciples and a few others spent much time in the "upper room," they also spent a great deal of time at the temple. They seemed to alternate from one place to the other. No doubt, they retreated to the upper room in the evening and spent some of their daylight hours in the temple.

⁴See, for example, [Ezekiel 11:18-21; 36:22-32; 37:1-14; 39:29; Zechariah 4:6-9](#).

⁵Technically, Pentecost comes 50 days after the offering of the first fruits of grain. Since this comes toward the end of the nearly two-week long celebration of Passover (including the Feast of Unleavened Bread), some consider this whole period as Passover.

⁶BDAG – *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Third Edition, Copyright 2000, The University of Chicago Press.

⁷I can't help but wonder if they were "**all together**," celebrating Passover.

⁸I am reminded of [Romans 10:6-8](#) in this regard.

⁹I realize that Jesus, like the rabbis of His day, may have sat when they taught, but I think it is still true that one normally does not sit when they are working at something. For example, I think that it may be true that when folks prayed, they often (though not always) did so standing (see [Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11](#)).

¹⁰R. T. France, *I Came to Set the Earth on Fire* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 126. It should be noted, however, that Joachim Jeremias (on whose calculations France rests his estimate of 180,000 people) later suggested that this estimate might still be a bit too high. Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), p. 84.

¹¹The "**you**" here in verse 14 is singular both times. God is promising Moses that He will go with him personally, but He is not promising to go with Israel.

¹²My good friend, Don Curtis, has written an excellent lesson on the Jewish holidays, which can be found on the bible.org web site: [/seriespage/lord's-appointed-times-leviticus-23](#).

¹³Much has been made of the "**two loaves**." Some think they signify the two tablets on which the Law was written (later Judaism saw Pentecost as the celebration of the law being given to Israel). Some think that one loaf symbolizes believing Jews while the other believing Gentiles. To be honest, I have no strong convictions on what the symbolism stands for.

The New Covenant

by [Keith Mathison](#)

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/new-covenant/>

The Book of Hebrews is a declaration of the absolute supremacy of Jesus Christ. Hebrews tells us that Jesus is superior to the angels (ch. 1–2), superior to Moses (3–4:13), and superior to Aaron (4:14–7). His is a superior priesthood (8–10:18), and He has inaugurated a superior covenant (10:19–13).

Throughout the book of Hebrews, we find this emphasis on that which is new and better. In [Hebrews 7:12](#), for example, we are told that “when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.” When the former commandment is set aside “a better hope is introduced” (7:18–19). Jesus himself is the guarantor of the “better covenant” (7:22). [Hebrews 8:6](#) explains, “Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.” In [Hebrews 8:7](#), we are told that “if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.” And after quoting the promise of a new covenant found in [Jeremiah 31:31–34](#), the author of Hebrews says, “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (8:13).

These remarks in Hebrews, along with others elsewhere, have caused many to ask whether God made a mistake with the old covenant. Was God forced to abandon His original plan and move to an emergency backup plan? Does the fact that the old covenant is the old covenant mean that the new covenant was “plan b”? The answer is no. The fact that God inaugurated a new covenant does not mean that He made a mistake with the old covenant. The reason for this, however, may not be immediately evident.

The answer to the question becomes clearer when we examine [Jeremiah 31:31–34](#), in which the prophet foresees the inauguration of the new covenant. The author of Hebrews quotes this prophecy in Hebrews 8. In order to understand his explanation of the prophecy we have to understand something of the context in which it was written. We have to remember that the book of Hebrews was written to Jewish converts to Christianity who were suffering severe persecution for their faith. They were being tempted to revert back to old covenant forms and ceremonies in order to avoid such persecution. The author of Hebrews is telling these Christians that to return to old covenant ceremonies would be worse than futile because the old covenant administration was never intended by God to be permanent. In order to defend his point, he directs his readers to the Old Testament text of Jeremiah 31.

The author of Hebrews prefaces his explanation of Jeremiah 31 by reminding his readers that “if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second” (8:7). What he is saying here is that the very fact that the Old Testament promises a “new” covenant means that the Old Testament itself foresaw the temporary nature of the “old” covenant. There would never be any need for a “new” covenant if God had always intended the old covenant to be permanent. The author of Hebrews makes this point even more clearly in 8:13 when he says of Jeremiah: “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete.” When Jeremiah promises a “new” covenant, he automatically implies that the first covenant administration is “old” and temporary. In other words, it was always part of God’s plan from the beginning to inaugurate both covenants. God did not make a mistake or have to resort to “plan b.” Each covenant was suited to a particular time in redemptive history.

The fact that God always planned to inaugurate a new covenant raises the question of continuity. If God has inaugurated a new covenant in Christ, is there any continuity between the old covenant and the new? There have been those in the history of the church who have argued that there is little or no continuity between the old covenant and the new. Everything about the old covenant, it is argued, has been completely replaced by the

new. Those on this end of the spectrum would argue that virtually nothing in the Old Testament is relevant or directly applicable to Christians today.

There have been others in the history of the church who have argued that there is little discontinuity between the covenants and that the changes made by the inauguration of the new covenant were essentially “cosmetic” changes. Those on this end of the spectrum would argue that much of the Old Testament is directly applicable to Christians today. Some who hold this view would argue that Christians must continue to observe the Sabbath on the seventh day or that Christians must continue to observe the Old Testament feast days. Both extremes should be avoided. There is both continuity and discontinuity between the old and new covenants.

While there are many today who read passages of Scripture, such as those found in [Hebrews 8:7](#) or [8:13](#), and conclude that there is no continuity between the two covenants, a closer examination of Hebrews 8 and the place of the new covenant in redemptive history reveals that such a conclusion is premature.

One of the most obvious points of continuity between the old and new covenants is found within the very promise of the new covenant itself. The author of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah’s new covenant prophecy in [Hebrews 8:8–12](#). In verse 10, we read, “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” We find a point of continuity in the words “my laws.” Under the old covenant, God wrote His laws on tablets of stone ([Ex. 24:12](#)). Under the new covenant, God will write His laws on the hearts of His people to replace the sin that is presently written there ([Jer. 17:1](#)), but that which is written by God on the hearts of His people remains essentially the same as that which was written on tablets of stone. That aspect of the law that most fundamentally reflects God’s own righteous character always remains the same.

Another way to explain the continuity between the old and new covenants is to apply the illustration Paul uses in [Galatians 3:24–25](#). Paul writes, “So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.” The “guardian” (Greek *paidagogos*), was a slave whose job it was to conduct a young boy to and from school and to supervise his conduct. When the boy grew up, the “guardian” was no longer needed. This analogy can help us understand better the elements of continuity between the covenants.

The point of application to the issue of continuity is this: Once the child has grown to adulthood the guardian is obsolete, but that which the guardian taught the child is not. Paul uses this analogy of growth from childhood to adulthood as a way of viewing the people of God throughout redemptive history. The old covenant administration was intended for the people of God in their “childhood.” When the people of God reach “adulthood,” this childhood “guardian” is no longer needed. It is now “obsolete.” But that which the guardian taught the child (“my laws”) remains the same even after he becomes an adult.

The focal point where the old and new covenants meet is found in Jesus Christ. The old covenant, as a guardian, prepares the way for Him and prepares His people for Him. The old covenant included that which has been traditionally described as “moral law” as well as that which was typical. That which was typical underwent change when the reality to which it pointed arrived. When the dawn came, the shadows disappeared (cf. [Heb. 10:1](#)). The people of God are now defined in terms of their relation to Jesus (cf. [Gal 3:16, 29](#)) rather than their relation to Jacob/Israel. The Promised Land is now defined in terms of the entire creation (cf. [Matt. 5:5](#); [Rom. 4:13](#)) rather than a piece of real estate on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. The temple is now defined in terms of Jesus Christ and His people (cf. [John 2:21](#); [1 Cor. 3:16](#); [Eph. 2:21](#)) rather than a building of stone and mortar. The ceremonial laws are now defined in terms of the atoning death of Christ (cf. [Heb. 9:11–10:11](#)) rather than the blood of bulls and goats.

The moral law, however, — that which sets forth the universal and eternal standards of righteousness — is unchanged. Although it is now written on the hearts of God's people rather than on tablets of stone, this law remains the same.