

Pentecost and the Holy Spirit

The Spirit's Association with Pentecost

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Each holy day is significant in its own special way, but I think that Pentecost has a special aura about it. Perhaps this sermon will help you to understand, maybe by seeing it the way the Jews do. It might help us to understand its importance in the overall purpose that God is working out.

I have five brief illustrations that have been extracted from commentaries that I have read through the years:

- One Jew said that Pentecost is only one day long, but it's like a brilliant flash of light on a gloomy day.
- Another said that the three holy day seasons (Passover and Unleavened Bread being one of them; Pentecost; and Tabernacles) are like three men traveling together to a distant location, and the most important (Pentecost) walks in the middle.
- Another said that Passover teaches us political freedom; Tabernacles, economic freedom; but Pentecost, spiritual freedom.
- Another one said that Pentecost is the only holy day that one is commanded to *count*. The count is long enough to be significant, and yet not so long that one loses track. The counting emphasizes its significance.
- Finally, the Talmud compares Pentecost to a king who was riding one day and found an important man bound in a pit. The king said, "I will loose your bond, take you from the pit, and after a set time, give you my daughter to wife." Well, the man was overjoyed, and he began counting the days. So it was that God freed Israel from Egypt and promised to give them His law at a certain time.

Now, what is interesting from our point of view is that, though the Jews recognize that this day holds something of great importance, they limit it to the Old Covenant and the giving of the Law. But, as important as those acts of God were, they pale into insignificance before the New Covenant giving of His Holy Spirit and the founding and building of His church. It is the giving of His Spirit that makes possible the achievement of God's purpose—that is, our destiny to be in the image of God spiritually and morally and, thus, sons of God in His very family. Pentecost focuses on this.

Israel Lacked the Holy Spirit

Let's begin in Deuteronomy 29: 2-4. We will begin in the Old Testament, in the Old Covenant. We're not focusing directly upon Pentecost here, but in an indirect way, it has to be a foundation for what happened a little bit later.

And Moses called unto all Israel, and said unto them, You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land: The great temptations

which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles: Yet the LORD has not given you [Israelites, the people who had been alive through the wilderness journey, perhaps some of them the whole 40 years] a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.

Reflect forward to the New Covenant. It is God's leading and guiding by His Holy Spirit, enabling us *to perceive, to see* and *to hear* His Word. These people were 38 or 40 years in the wilderness in the presence of God, yet they didn't get it. It never sank in. The reason it never sank in is because God did not perform that which would have given them the ability to perceive what was going on in their lives.

In Deuteronomy 5:29, we will see this confirmed. This is near the end of the chapter that contains the second recording of the Ten Commandments. Moses writes:

O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!

Except for a precious few of those Israelites, nobody received God's Holy Spirit under the Old Covenant. It's because of this that we see scriptures like this quoted—so that we will understand them in a New Testament context. Romans 11:8-11:

(According as it is written, God has given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day. [The "they," of course, is Israel.] And David said, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompense unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back always. I say then, [Paul reaches a conclusion] Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

So, spiritually—from the time of the Exodus (sometime around the 1400s B.C.) all the way up until the time that Paul wrote these things—these people hadn't been offered the Holy Spirit at all. And so, *spiritually* they had a form of "blindness" or they were "sleeping," as Paul said. When you're like that, you don't know what's going on. You are oblivious to what is going on around you. So it ought to be very easy for us to read about Israel's constant bickering, warring, complaining, sexual sins, intrigues and murders, remembering that they were operating within a *God-imposed spiritual handicap*—so that *an example* could be set (and written) for us to learn from. That's quite a detriment, if we look at it from a human perspective. God, of course, knew what He was doing all along. He put these people

through the paces in order that *our* understanding might be much deeper and broader.

Still Future in John's Day

In Luke 3:16, we read of John the Baptist:

John answered, saying unto them all [that is, to all of those who were there], I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I comes, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

This occurs before the beginning of the ministry of Jesus Christ, at least three and one-half years before the giving of God's Holy Spirit. Even in Acts 1:4-5, the Holy Spirit was still not yet given:

And being assembled together with them [the disciples], commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, you have heard of me. For, John truly baptized with water; but you shall [still future] be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence.

That's pretty clear. Even up till a few days before Pentecost in AD 31, the receipt of the Holy Spirit by people in general was yet a future occurrence. So, when God's moment arrived, He introduced the Spirit to mankind with a mighty visible and audible display. I think part of it was because it ranks as one of the most important acts of God for the completion of His purpose, even to this very day.

Even today—2,000 years after the fact of the giving of God's Holy Spirit on that day of Pentecost—the overwhelming bulk of mankind that has even *some understanding* of this day at the same time has no idea of its detailed significance. Thus, even if they do celebrate it, they do it with very little understanding. Many Protestant denominations call it "Whitsunday," which is derived from "white Sunday"—because it became a custom to baptize converts that day, while they were wearing white baptismal gowns. It sounds good. It might even sound logical and reasonable to some, but it doesn't have any (or very little) biblical significance. So the real meaning of the day is *lost* to them. Two thousand years after the fact, it is still *lost* to them.

Now, all too often, what happens is that people focus their attention on the manifestations of the day—the mighty rushing wind, the flames of fire that appeared to rise out of or settle down on people, and above all, speaking in tongues. The idea seems to be among those "charismatics," as they are called, that the emphasis is on *getting* something from God that will make them into a notable person to those around them. This is something that appears to sound good at first. But, with the emphasis on *getting*, it totally misses the point and doesn't glorify

God at all.

Why Did God Give It to Us?

Now, why did God give His Holy Spirit? Why is it so important to us personally? This sermon will center around the answer to these questions. I'm only going to cover three points. I'm sure that you could come up with more; but I decided to think only about these three, because they have something to do with things that were said in this introduction. I think that it's essential that we understand the reason that is given to us personally. So, let's go back to Acts 2:14-21. We'll start there rather than at the beginning of the chapter, and then we'll go back and pick up some points that are important to this sermon.

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, You men of Judea, and all you that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as you suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel, And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

It's interesting to note that Peter did not say that this was "the fulfillment" of what Joel spoke. The reason he did not say it was "the fulfillment" is because much of the prophecy of Joel was not yet fulfilled. Peter understood that—and you can very easily see it. Peter knew that it was *only the beginning* of what Joel spoke, because God's Spirit was not being poured out on all flesh. That will be obvious in just a bit. The sun and moon didn't change their appearance, and not everybody that "called on the name of the Lord" was being saved. What we see here is something that was similar to what happened when Jesus quoted Isaiah 61 in Luke 4, when He began His ministry in His home town. Parts of the prophecy Jesus left out. Peter recognized that this was *only the beginning* of what Joel prophesied.

A number of things that occurred on this occasion we should take note of before we go on to other things. So drop back to verse 2.

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

It's interesting that it doesn't say that a wind actually blew. It does say that there came the *sound* of a mighty rushing wind. Maybe a wind did blow, but at least it had a hurricane-like sound. The sound was understood or it was perceived to be coming from heaven. It says that it filled the whole house where they were sitting, which is interesting. Why would he mention *sitting*? Why weren't they just standing around and fellowshiping with one another? Well, because in all probability "the house" that is mentioned there was, in actuality, the Temple. They were sitting because it was a holy day, and they were having a service.

It's also interesting to note that the *sound* only filled "the house," not the whole city. Even if we allow that some of the sound went to some of the area around "the house," that's fine—as long as we understand that it was contained to that general area where "the house" was. Now, we know that some outside (at least, outside of the room that they were in) heard it, because they were attracted by the fact that the sound was emanating from where these people were sitting and having a meeting. So, these other people were gathered in a general area, lending more credence to the probability that "the house" here was the Temple.

And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. (verse 3)

In addition to the wind-like sound, flames of fire appeared either to fall upon or to rise from those who were given God's Spirit. There's no indication that these flames appeared on anybody else, except those who were *in the house*. This may have been done because fire had previously been associated with a form of baptism—another reason why I read to you Luke 3 where John the Baptist mentioned the "baptism of fire." So, it had previously been associated with a form of baptism by John the Baptist. God used the fire to identify those who were receiving His Spirit at that time—a form of visible "sanctification" (being set apart). In any case, nothing like that occurs at "tarry meetings"—nor does it occur when any of us receive God's Holy Spirit.

Speaking in Tongues

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (verse 4)

Those in the house were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke with *other languages*. These were not *unknown* languages—but languages familiar with people in the area, because we read in verse 6:

Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

Notice that in verse 4 the word "tongues" appears, but in verse 6 the word "language" appears. Now, why weren't they both translated the same way? The reason is because it's two different words. The one in verse 4 is the one that we are most familiar with. We have probably heard in the past that it's *glossais*, and that word means (in today's usage) "a language" or "tongue." But in verse 6 the Greek word is *dialekto*. That word has practically come into the English language untranslated; it means "dialect." So these people not only heard in their own language—they heard in their own dialect. Now, I am sure that God refined this to ensure that we would understand that this manifestation was of *languages people were familiar with but did not necessarily speak themselves*, because they not only recognized the language itself, but even the various local dialects within the language. These people, then, to whom God gave His Holy Spirit, were not speaking in an unintelligible gibberish, but *each person hearing heard each person speaking* in not only his own language, but even his own dialect!

You might recall that, as Jesus was on trial, Peter was identified as being Galilean because of the way he spoke. Let's say that the Jews in Judea spoke Aramaic, and that Peter spoke Aramaic. And yet, Peter spoke it in a dialect different from the Judeans in Jerusalem. And so, very quickly, that young lady identified Peter as being a Galilean. That's the kind of thing that we're talking about here in Acts 2—that God worked an awesome miracle. The miracle was not only in the speaking. The miracle in the hearing may have even been greater, because the miracle had to work in each person's mind so that they heard each person speaking in their own dialect. That's pretty precise.

Based upon what Paul writes in I Corinthians 14 about God's concern for order and organization at services, I am sure that not everyone of those people who were receiving God's Holy Spirit were all speaking at once. Rather, it was organized by God so that the distinct language and the dialect could be clearly and distinctly heard by those who were observant. This was an awesome miracle! And the combination of these factors was never again repeated.

There is no specific reference as to what those who were filled with the Holy Spirit uttered. Therefore, at this point the purpose of them "speaking in other languages" was not to get the observers to listen intently to what they were saying but to grab their attention to what would be said later: Peter's sermon.

Who Were the Listeners?

There is serious doubt, though (with the exception of one group, which I'll mention later), whether the people listening were "pilgrims" who had just recently traveled to Jerusalem. Notice verse 8:

And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

This begins to indicate that these people who were hearing were foreign-born

inhabitants of Jerusalem—that these people were not merely visiting, but were living there. Now look at verse 5.

And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

In every place that I looked where the word "dwelling" is used, it is talking about inhabitants living permanently in the land.

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, You men of Judea, and all you that dwell at Jerusalem. . . .
(verse 14)

Do you see whom he addressed? The inhabitants of Jerusalem. Now, they may have been foreign-born, but for whatever the reason, they were now living in Jerusalem. I take that to mean a lot of businessmen had been transferred there by their "companies," their "corporations" (I'm using modern metaphors here), and they were now living there, conducting business. They were largely Jews who may have, like the apostle Paul, been born in another area of the Roman Empire. But they traveled to Jerusalem, put down roots there, and were now living there. Their native tongue was not Aramaic, but it may have been something like Greek or Latin.

The exception is in verse 10:

Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes.

If you have a modern Bible, it is very likely that that word "strangers" has been translated into the word "visitors." In fact, the *King James* margin reads "visitors." Those from Rome were "visitors." Something else buttresses this fact—that so many people were baptized:

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day [Pentecost] there were added unto them about three thousand souls. (verse 41)

This was not a modern Billy Graham evangelistic campaign, where he gives a sermon and three thousand people answer the altar call. What we're dealing with here are people who were foreign-born but were now living in Jerusalem. They evidently had lived there for quite a long time. These people were eye- and ear-witnesses to the ministry of Jesus Christ. They saw Him. They heard Him. They may have participated in His murder. Even if they did not participate, they may have given approval. Or, even if they didn't give approval, they were eyewitness to the things that had occurred. So, on this day of Pentecost *God—by His Spirit—opened their minds*, and the impact of what they had witnessed in that previous three and

one-half years all came together when they heard Peter's sermon. They were smitten in their hearts. And they repented because they were ready.

Modern Protestant evangelists would like to give you the impression that you can hear one sermon, and, boy, you're converted. I'm afraid, brethren, that it takes a lot more than that for God to lead us to repentance. *So much preceded* this occasion *to set these people up*. During the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, God was leading these people to repentance. Then, when they heard Peter's sermon, with the help of God's Holy Spirit giving the sermon and leading them, they repented and were baptized.

"You Shall Receive Power"

Now, in Acts 11:15, where Peter is recounting what occurred at the house of Cornelius, he says:

And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

So, what Peter confirmed here is that the receiving of the Holy Spirit is, indeed, also the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The receiving and the baptism of the Holy Spirit are synonymous. Now, when we are baptized by the Holy Spirit, what is it that we are receiving? I think that if there is any one English word that might catch the essence of this, it is "power." In Acts 1:8, Jesus is speaking.

But you shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

"You shall receive power." Now, let's go to II Timothy 1:7 where we will see a confirmation of this. This is another familiar scripture, but we'll read it again on this day.

For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

That should ring a bell in our minds. We've heard it very, very often. We'll turn to another one in the book of Romans that we don't hear very often, but it is part and parcel of the same kind of thinking.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit.
(Romans 15:13)

I brought this in because I want us to see that it is the Holy Spirit that *empowers* us, or *enables things to be accomplished* through it or by means of it, and so we can hope. We're empowered to hope by God's Holy Spirit. Notice verse 19:

Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the spirit of God;
so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Ilyricum, I have fully
preached the gospel of Christ.

Paul conducted his ministry by means of the power of God. Signs, wonders, miracles, healings, and things of that nature were done through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Just in passing—this might be of interest because of what is happening in Bosnia—"Ilyricum" is the ancient name for "Yugoslavia." So, the gospel was preached there a couple of thousand years ago to those people.

A Channel for God's Creative Energy

There is an aspect to this that we don't think of very often, in regard to receiving the Holy Spirit. Most frequently, we think of the Holy Spirit as a tool given to us to use so that we be converted. It's not wrong to think of it in this way, but there is a side to this that we don't think of very often, and yet it is more important. We need to understand this in order to get the right perspective on why the Holy Spirit is given to us.

In Psalm 104: 30, we will pick up a concept that is important to understanding:

You send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of
the earth.

I chose this verse to begin this section because it contains a very clear statement of this element. I will read a portion of this verse from the *Knox Translation* of the Bible: "Then You send forth Your spirit and there is fresh creation."

The Holy Spirit is the *means*, the *channel*, through which God's creative energy, His power, is manifested. Here, in Psalm 104, it is strictly a physical application. But, if God did not send forth His Spirit, there would have been neither "a creation" nor a "renewing." I'll make it even plainer. If God had not sent forth His Spirit, earth would never have appeared, or it would have remained in a state of destruction.

Now, let's go to Isaiah 32: 13-18.

Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briers; yes, upon
all the houses of joy in the joyous city: Because the palaces shall be
forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left; the forts and towers
shall be for dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks; until
the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a

fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest. Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.

One phrase from the Moffatt translation, from verse 15, really catches the thought so clearly: "And yet one day from the heights of heaven a spirit shall breathe unto us [or, into us]." Then, following that are the results of that Spirit.

Again, in this context, just as in Psalm 104, things begin in a state of destruction and remain that way until God sends forth His Spirit. Then, *regeneration* of both the people and the land takes place, and the *transformation* of both occurs. Are you beginning to get the point?

This is something that occurs throughout the Bible. Notice Ezekiel 36: 24:

For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.

This is where the context begins—with the children of Israel coming out of their captivity.

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you. [What's that? The Holy Spirit!] And you shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart [conversion begins] also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them. And you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers: and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that you shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen. (verses 25-30)

Jump to chapter 37: 12-14:

Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus says the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my spirit in you, and you shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then

shall you know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, says the LORD.

You see a very familiar pattern taking place. Again, I will read to you just a couple of phrases out of the Moffatt translation. This is Ezekiel 36: 26: "I will give you a new nature, and I will put a new spirit into you. I will take away your hard nature and give you a nature that can be touched."

Again, God sends forth His Spirit and *transformation* begins and continues. Now, what am I saying? Let's not forget Acts 2, the receiving of God's Holy Spirit, given to us personally. What does it mean? The Holy Spirit is given to us *not primarily for our use* but, rather, as *the means through which God does His work!* It is the tool of His creating.

God's Work Is Creating

Now, let's go to another familiar scripture and look at it in this light. Zechariah 4: 6:

Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

Let me paraphrase that. "Not by human might or power, or even by humans using God's Spirit, but by *God using His Spirit.*" We just read in Ezekiel how that He showed all that *He* was going to do. "*I will sprinkle clean water. I will change your nature. I will make your plant to grow. I will cause your trees to fruit. I will do this. I will do that.*" If He did not send forth His Spirit, and then continue to work in the people in their behalf, the destruction would remain and essentially nothing, including the people, would change.

We have to remember a few things that Jesus and some of the apostles said that are important in this regard. Jesus says in John 5: 17, "My Father works, and I work." The implication is that "My Father has been working from the beginning, and He's continuing to work." Now, what is Their work? Their work is *creating*. Their work is creation. God is the Potter, we are the clay. He's the One who is doing the shaping, the molding. He is the One who is doing the creating. "It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves." He is the One who is continuing the creation that He began and revealed in Genesis 1. He is still working on us!

Continuing the pottery metaphor, the Holy Spirit, then, can be compared to the water that the potter uses to bring the clay to the right consistency to enable the potter to shape it. Now, let's go to Galatians 6: 15 where Paul writes:

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation [or, a new creature].

What he is saying is that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any great importance in terms of conversion, the way of God. What is important is that there is a *new* creation. So, this verse really is neither for nor against circumcision. It is only saying that *what really matters is whether a person has been divinely transformed into a morally new and different person*. In that, there is very great spiritual benefit. We're talking here about new creation. In II Corinthians 5: 5 Paul writes:

Now he that has wrought us [Isn't that interesting? "He that has *made us . . .*"] for the selfsame thing is God, who also has given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

I read verse 5 just to introduce to us the fact that God is working and that the Holy Spirit is mentioned in relation to "transformation" and "eternal life."

Therefore [the context's concluding statement] if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. (verse 17)

Please remember Psalm 104, Genesis 1, Isaiah 32 and Ezekiel 36. It also appears in Jeremiah and Ezekiel 37. We just read something there in Zechariah. It's all over the place—if we only have the eyes to see. God sends His Spirit forth and *creation* takes place. If whatever He sends His Spirit forth into has already been created, then *transformation* takes place. From what to what? Transformation takes place *from* a state of destruction *to* a state of purity, cleanness, construction, and order—*from* confusion *to* order. Isn't that what happened in Genesis 1? The Spirit of God brooded over the face of the deep, looking down on the disorganized state of confusion, and then God sent forth His Spirit. Out of that confusion came order and beauty and life.

When God sent forth His Spirit to *us*, what kind of condition were we in? We were in Babylon—just as confused as everybody else. We were headed for the grave. We were in varying degrees of destruction and disorder. And, when He sent forth His Spirit, *transformation* began. God was creating! How much did we have to do with that? Why is the Spirit given to us? So that *God* can create. Can you see the difference? So often, brethren, we emphasize what *we* do with the Holy Spirit. But brethren, what we do with the Holy Spirit is so tiny and insignificant—compared to *what God does*. Could the creation in Genesis 1 have regenerated itself, transformed itself, recouped itself, from its state of destruction? No. In like manner, neither could we. So we read:

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new, and all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation. To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto

them; and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be you reconciled to God. For he has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin: that we might be made. . . . (II Corinthians 5: 17-21)

See that word? "That we might be *made*" That indicates creation—building up, forming, shaping. But what are we being "made" into? ". . . the righteousness of God in Him"! So, these verses indicate that *a new life* began when we received God's Holy Spirit. You can parallel this with John 3: 3. Even my Study Bible, with its Protestant footnotes, admits that verse 21—though it might apply to justification (that is, made the righteousness of God)—most probably it applies to *sanctification* (holiness) wherein the righteousness of God or of Christ is applied daily. So that indicates to them—even to them!—a *process*, because they then refer us to II Corinthians 3: 18:

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed [transformed] into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Boy! That just ties everything into a nice neat package. The *power* of God is given so that He might have a bridgehead *into us* to carry out *the spiritual creation of transformation of us into His image*. What are we being transformed by? The Spirit of God. Let me repeat this first point. The receiving of God's Holy Spirit is not so much for our use as it is for God's—that He might carry out His creative efforts in our lives.

The Second Point

Not long after Acts 2 God records something in His Word that shows there is a limit to our access to that Spirit. God spells out very clearly why there is a limitation in Acts 8. This is the chapter where Philip went to Samaria. He preached there, and quite a number of people believed, and he baptized them. Then the apostles sent Peter and John there to lay hands on them. Among those people who had been baptized was one Simon Magus:

Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit. . . . And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit. But Peter said unto him, Your money perish with you, because you have thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money: You have neither part nor lot in this

matter: for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I perceive that you art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. (Acts 8: 14-15, 18-23)

The first thing we need to understand here is that this was the sin of a person who had ostensibly repented and had assuredly been baptized. It's also very clear that he wanted the Holy Spirit for the wrong reasons. Peter's reply could hardly be more strongly phrased. Listen to how it is translated in the *Phillips Translation*. I hope you are not offended: "But Peter said to him, 'To hell with you and your money!'" Almost every translation softens this. It may sound like profanity, but, brethren, that is exactly, literally, what the Greek says. I don't know if Peter said it like I did, but he was pretty emphatic in what he said to this man. There was something drastically wrong in this man's request for the Holy Spirit. What Peter did was the equivalent of uttering a curse on this man. He consigned him to hell. What he was saying was "unless you repent, unless you change, you and your money will both end up in the Lake of Fire." Pretty serious stuff. What Simon did reveals a total misunderstanding of the nature of God and His gifts. It was a serious misunderstanding that must be nipped in the bud, because Simon's fundamental attitudes were out of harmony with God.

Things like this happened before and were recorded. For instance, in Psalm 78 where it says that Israel's heart was not right with God. That was the problem. Now, Simon was preoccupied with the external consequences of him having this power. See? What was underlying this was that he wanted the Holy Spirit because of what it was going to mean to him.

Not a Power To Be Controlled

A little background: Simon was a magician, and his magical powers glorified him. He saw the receiving of God's Holy Spirit as another means of glorifying himself. It was nothing more than self-centered *idolatry*. He wanted to get it so that he would be glorified before people. Idolatry—that was the central issue here. There is no sin worse than idolatry.

There is a strong desire in all of us to control. We would like to control events so that we are comfortable with the results, so that we might look good, so that we might be well thought of, so that we might be vindicated before men, so that we might gain financially, so that we might get even with somebody that we think did us wrong, or so that we might avoid pain. Now, how often have you been in traffic and somebody cuts you off, and you wished that you had a tank with which you could "control" what was going on in traffic? We want to control. If we aren't careful, this attitude crashes into our worship of and our relationship with God and our fellowship and relationships within the church.

Simon made the mistake of thinking that he could manipulate this power of God to

his own end. We can very subtly be moved into this same position. It doesn't happen to us very often, but it happens frequently to people in the world. How many people have made similar mistakes? God gives His Spirit to those who obey Him, and Jesus tells us that God is more willing to give us His Spirit than we are to feed our children bread (Luke 11: 11-13). But this is *conditioned* by why we want it, by why we want to use it, or what we want to use it for, or what use we are going to put it to. Remember—God can read the heart.

Now, let's go to I Corinthians 14:1, because I want us to see that God wants us to have His Spirit in an abundance. We want to meet conditions that are right with Him. So Paul writes:

Follow after charity [or, love], and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that you may prophesy.

Now again, the Phillips' Translation says: "Follow then the way of love while you set your heart on the gifts of the Spirit, and the highest gift you can wish for is to be able to speak the messages of God."

So, it's not wrong to desire the gifts of God's Spirit; but the desire has to be right. Simon desired, but it obviously was not right. It was rejected immediately, because it was for self-centered reasons. Now, in I Corinthians 12: 1-2:

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. You know that you were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as you were led.

Why does that appear in this context about gifts? He brings up the subject of idolatry, because we might be manipulated into seeking the gifts of God for the wrong reason and be subtly led into idolatry. As I said, the world does it frequently. Simon did it right off the bat, and God recorded it because He wanted it known right away that this is a "no, no," brethren. Stay away from it. He's very willing to give us the gifts of His Spirit. He's very willing to give us His Spirit in abundant amounts. But it is conditioned by the quality of our desire. If we want it for selfish reasons, we're not going to get it. If we want it to glorify Him, we're going to get it. There's no doubt about it.

So, he interjects idolatry. I'm sure that that was a warning. Part of the reason was because these people in Corinth were using their gifts for self-exaltation. That's why chapter 13, most noticeably, is in there. The greatest thing of all is love. All these other gifts are not worth anything by comparison. I wonder how many people have wanted to speak in tongues because they wanted to prove that they had the Holy Spirit. That's a self-centered reason. I wonder how many wanted to speak in tongues to God to heal sicknesses, or to be used for other miracles, appear to be very wise, discerning, or a great teacher for the purposes of self-exaltation. They were drifting toward the area of idolatry. It doesn't matter what the desired gift

might be. If the desire is wrong, as Simon's was, then it is not the Spirit of God that is going to come into that person.

Given for the Common Good

Let's notice I Corinthians 12: 7 from the Phillips' Translation:

Every man is given his gifts by the spirit, that he may use it for the common good.

This is telling us two things:

1. *Everybody gets gifts from the Spirit of God.* Nobody has been left out.
2. The most important thing of all is that *the gift is given for the common good.*

Now verse 11 from the Berkley Translation:

All these abilities one and the same spirit energizes, distributing to each individual exactly as He [God] pleases.

The secondary purpose God gives His Spirit is for the good of the church. Even in this, God retains control and apportions it according to His will. So we have two purposes already:

1. God gives His Spirit so that He has a bridge into the person to begin and carry on His creation. He's the creator. He's the potter. We're the clay He's shaping and molding.
2. The Spirit is given for the benefit of the church—to empower it. We don't *need* the gift of tongues anymore, except in extremely rare instances. Today, we have no need of the interpretation of tongues anymore than the other. Does the church benefit because someone can pray to God in a different language? Not at all. We should occasionally ask God to give His gifts as He sees fit—to benefit the church and to glorify Him.

For Our Growth in His Image

The third purpose God gives His Spirit is for our own spiritual well-being and growth. This is important because from it comes the power to yield to God—and, thus, be prepared for God's Kingdom and glorify Him along the way.

Let's go to II Peter 1: 2-4:

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that has called us to glory and virtue. Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be

partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Did you notice verse 3? "According as *his divine power* has given unto us *all things* that pertain unto life and godliness." Moffatt translates this: "Inasmuch as His divine power has bestowed upon us every requisite for life and godliness." It means that He has not only given us gifts by His Spirit, but He has also empowered us to use them. The purpose is to draw us to sharing His glorious life and goodness. But, in order to do this, there must be a break with the corruption of the past (verse 4). So, in plain language, He says He has given to us all what we need to live the good life. In Ephesians 3: 20, Paul writes that God has done more than we can think or ask. I can't reach any other conclusion than that we have no real excuse for *not yielding* and *overcoming*.

In II Peter 1: 2-3, we have an indication of the mechanism, if I can put it that way, by which these powers are given to us. Peter mentions the knowledge of God. This knowledge is both academic (the book-learning kind) and experiential (what we learn as a result of our relationship with Him). A common cliché says, "Knowledge is power," and it is a true saying because knowledge enables us to accomplish.

What does this have to do with the Holy Spirit? In John 14: 15-17, Jesus says:

If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it sees him not, neither knows him; but you know him; for he dwells with you, and shall be in you.

Howbeit, when it, the Spirit of truth is come, it will guide you into all truth: for it shall not speak of itself; but whatsoever it shall hear, that shall it speak: and it will show you things to come. (John 16: 13)

The most essential area of knowledge that mankind needs is truths regarding relationships—with God and man—because this knowledge determines the quality and the length of life. It determines whether we'll be prepared for God's kingdom and, therefore, what happens beyond death. I said the quality and length of life because eternal life is, by biblical definition, not merely length of life, but also the quality of life that God lives. Only those who have satisfied God that they will live this kind of life forever will share life with Him and Jesus Christ forever. God gives His Spirit that we might have this most essential knowledge and, therefore, *power*.

How does it come? By the Spirit that He calls "the Spirit of truth." He gives us the truth about relationships. He gives us the truth about Him. He gives us the truth about what we are. He gives us the truth about what our destiny is. He gives us the truth about how that destiny is going to be reached. He gives us the truth about how our relationships can be better. He gives us the truth about every essential

area that has to do with relationships between us and Him and between us and fellow man. He doesn't really have to give us the truth about things involving science, because He's given us a spirit that enables us—that is, by which we are empowered—to dig those things out. These other essential things—the most important things in all of life—come to us as a result of His Spirit being given to us.

In Romans 15: 13, we saw that hope comes as a result of us having God's Spirit. Hope is a powerful motivator. There is power there—in knowing what the right hope is. If we don't have hope, we will be so passive as to accomplish almost nothing. A farmer sows in hope of a crop. A businessman invests in hope of a profit. The athlete trains and disciplines himself in hope of victory. *The Christian chooses and yields in hope of eternal life.*

Another thing that comes by the Spirit of God should be very obvious. Romans 5: 5:

And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.

There is the power that makes relationships work. We could show how that God teaches us in various places of His Word how power is imparted through a specialized knowledge that is possible to us only after He has opened our minds by His Spirit. Knowledge is, indeed, power.

We find in Galatians 5: 22 the "fruit of the Spirit"—fruit that is produced by the Spirit. Those qualities are the product of what Paul called "living and walking in the Spirit."

Fulfilling God's Plan for His Glory

So, these three areas—all of them focusing on the use of power, the use of God's Holy Spirit, and all leading to the awesome fulfillment of God's plan for the firstfruits—are what makes this day so important to us. Because *we are the firstfruits*—and it is something worthy to us to humbly rejoice in.

Point 1: The Holy Spirit is God's bridgehead through which He works His spiritual creation.

Point 2: The Holy Spirit is given to empower the church.

Point 3: The Holy Spirit is given to empower us to yield to God.

We will conclude by reading Ephesians 3: 14-21 from the *Revised English Bible*. Remember that this is a prayer. Paul prays:

For this in mind then, I kneel in prayer to the Father from whom every family in heaven and earth takes its name, that out of the treasurers of His glory He may grant you inward strength and power through His Spirit, that through faith Christ may dwell in your heart in love. With

deep root and firm foundation, may you, in company with all God's people, be strong to grasp what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth of Christ's love, and to know it, though it be beyond knowledge, so you may be filled with the very fullness of God. Now to him who is able, through the power which is at work among us, to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or conceive, to Him be glory in the church and Christ Jesus from generation to generation forevermore. Amen.