

WE ARE ONE IN THE SPIRIT

PENTECOST

GOD GAVE US THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO UNIFY AND BUILD UP HIS CHURCH.

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We Are One in the Spirit

Pentecost

This is Pentecost Sunday. It is the day in which we celebrate the birth of the church. Technically it is meant to be connected with Easter. In fact the word Pentecost has to do with the number 50. It coincides with the Hebrew holiday of Shavuot. Shavuot is known as the Festival of Weeks or the Festival of First Fruits. It comes 50 days or 7 weeks after Passover. It was originally associated with agriculture. The spring fruits were harvested and an offering to God was made. Later on it also came to celebrate the giving of the Law from God to Moses to the people of Israel. Let me get us caught up on the timeframe. Jesus was crucified during Passover. He rose from the dead 3 days later, and spent time with His followers for 40 days. On the 40th day, He ascended into heaven. The disciples returned to Jerusalem and prayed for 10 days. On the 50th day, the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came physically to these first believers, baptized them, filled them, and manifested Himself in them. In essence, these believers became the first fruits of the Christian Church. These believers then started speaking in tongues; praising God.

Today there has been a revived interest in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. People now think they have identified their gifts and are exercising them in the church. There are people who speak in tongues, claim to have the gift of knowledge or wisdom, or discernment, etc. I'm not here to say if these people actually do have these gifts or not. In fact, the more I grow as a believer, the more I'm not really sure what gifts I have or don't have; and even if they have changed throughout the years. The gifts I appear to be the strongest in are quiet gifts and often not noticeable.

What I do know is this. Before anyone talks about the gifts of the Spirit in their lives, they need to have first practiced humility and love for a long time. It seems to me that many Christians use gifts of the Spirit as a way to make their desires more authoritative, elevate themselves to a position of leadership, and promote their own personal agendas. Did you ever listen to people who claim to have existed in a prior life? Isn't it interesting that they were all pharaohs or rulers or kings or queens? I don't think I ever heard one of them say they were a slave or a peasant or a cleaning lady. People who claim to have gifts of the Spirit today seem to have the gifts that set them above others; giving them access to special knowledge or leadership roles. It's a shame that many churches and Christians emulate the early church in Corinth. They were using their gifts to one-up each other and divide the church. They remind me of an exhibit at a zoo named "Coexistence." In the area was a lion with several lambs. They all looked to be living successfully together. When someone asked the zookeeper if it was difficult to maintain the exhibit, he replied, "There's nothing to it. All I have to do now and then is add a few fresh lambs."

It seems to me that people are so narcissistic in our times that even in the church, people are so focused on what they want and their own personal desires, that they often use their Spiritual gifts for selfish ends.

However, as I read and study through this festival of Pentecost, it seems to me that it is a celebration of unity. In order to understand this event, we need to study what event it is the reversal of. Early on in the history of human society, human beings became proud and decided to rebel against God. God had specifically told them to multiply and fill the earth. Instead, they gathered together, built a city, and decided to stay together. In the end they built a tower that they said would reach heaven. They would be strong and unmovable. This made God extremely angry. He scattered the people throughout all the earth and confused their language. At that point many languages and cultures came into existence. This incident was called the Tower of Babel Incident.

In an uninformed rush to be politically and socially correct, many churches celebrate cultural diversity. Although I understand the sentiment, in fact our church is culturally diverse; celebrating diversity is

celebrating our rebellion against God. The part of diversity that we ought to be celebrating is our unity in the midst of our cultural diversity. In other words, we ought to be celebrating Pentecost, the unifying power of God's Holy Spirit that can bring people from many different languages and cultures together united under the Headship of Jesus Christ.

The main idea of this morning's text is this. **GOD GAVE US THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO UNIFY AND BUILD UP HIS CHURCH.** We are going to look at a direct reversal of the curse that took place at the Tower of Babel. Even though God is One; it seems as if He reveals specific parts of Himself primarily at different times. In other words, God the Father is primarily present during Old Testament times. Jesus is center stage during His lifetime on earth. The Holy Spirit is in the spotlight during the church age. That is an oversimplification and all Three Persons in the Trinity are active all the time and their works are constantly interacting. But please allow me some latitude in the statement of there are times when One of the Trinity steps into the spotlight.

THE PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (JOHN 7:37-39)

In John 7:37-39 Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit. **JESUS PROMISED THAT AS CERTAIN AS HE WOULD POUR OUT GOD'S LOVE ON THE CROSS, GOD WOULD ALSO POUR OUT HIS LOVE FOR US BY FILLING US WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.** In other words, God manifested Himself in the flesh through the Person of Jesus. Jesus was about to be executed as an atonement for our sins. He would physically die, be buried, rise from the dead, and return to heaven. Jesus will not leave us as orphans nor will He leave us without God's presence. Jesus promised that when He returned to heaven, God would send the Holy Spirit to live with us, guide us, convict us, and comfort us.

A. THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS (37)

As we study through Pentecost we must keep in mind that the Holy Spirit will testify to the work of Jesus. In verse 37 we see the love of God in Jesus. This incident takes place during the Feast of Tabernacles. It is an interesting feast that celebrates God's miraculous provision for His people. It is a fall festival in which families would construct make-shift shelters out of branches and live outside, recalling their journey through the wilderness to the Promised land; especially focusing on God's provision and protection. It also was a festival dedicated to the agricultural season in which people gave thanks to God for the harvest. It is a lot like our Thanksgiving celebration in the United States.

During this holiday, magnificent lights were prominent at the temple and handheld torches by pilgrims. As part of the ceremony, priests would carry water from the Pool of Siloam and pour out water on the altar. In order for this to hit us like it would have hit the Hebrews, we have to remind ourselves of these two themes of light and water. God guided the Hebrews away from the slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land by means of a pillar or cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The pillar never left them. This pillar moved between the Hebrews and the Egyptians; keeping the Hebrews safe.

In the desert, there was limited water; and yet God made water pour out from rocks to keep the Hebrews alive along with providing them with manna from heaven to feed them. They were pilgrims in the dessert for 40 years. God was with them, fed them, protected them, and led them to their salvation in the Promised Land.

On the last day of the festival, perhaps when the priests poured out the water, Jesus said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink." Jesus told the Samaritan woman that if she placed her faith in Him, she would never thirst again. Jesus also claimed to be the light of the world. Jesus was claiming to be the Promised Messiah of Israel. He was claiming to be God in the flesh. Jesus told the people then and He continues to tell people now that our souls are thirsty and dying of thirst. Our souls long for living water. We can only find peace and reconciliation with God through the blood of Jesus. The Bible

is clear that God demonstrated His love for us in this act of Jesus. Jesus willingly laid down His life in the most horrible and bloody way; that if we place our faith in His finished work, we will be saved and be satisfied. We are dying of thirst. We are wandering around in the darkness. Only Jesus can light up our way and only Jesus can give us new life and bring our souls to life. If anyone thinks they are good in any way, I would invite them to look at the tortured and bloody Jesus hanging on the cross. That is for each one of our sins; no one is excluded. If anyone has a low self-esteem, feeling that they are unloved and unlovable, I would invite them to also look at this bloodied Jesus. His love for each one of us put Him there. Jesus on the cross is God's expression of love for us. A good, healthy evaluation of ourselves should both produce humility and belovedness. We should feel humbled, loved, and thankful; all at the same time.

B. THE LOVE OF GOD IN THE HOLY SPIRIT (38-39)

Jesus demonstrated His love for us at the cross. But Jesus further promised a manifestation of God's love in the Holy Spirit in verses 38-39. Here Jesus switched the metaphor of water describing Himself and His ministry to the Person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Keep in mind that Jesus is still in the flesh and has not yet accomplished His mission on the cross. He promised His followers that if they believed in Him, they would also be filled with the Holy Spirit. I know there is a bit of confusion and debate about when and how we receive the Holy Spirit. Part of that confusion comes from the New Testament itself. But I think if we read and study, some things become clear. In one sense, the early church is different from us. They lived with Jesus and received the Holy Spirit as two experientially different events. At crucial times, there is an evangelical outreach where people are saved; then Peter and John go to them and they receive the Holy Spirit. It happens in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to out and out Gentiles.

But as we observe in other parts, receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior brings with that act simultaneously the filling of the Holy Spirit. I think that it happened dramatically and in stages for the very early church because it was a sign of unity. In other words, if I were a Jew; placed my faith in Jesus and spoke in tongues as a sign of God's work; then it would be impossible to deny the authentic faith of a Gentile who came to faith in Jesus and spoke in tongues. Later on in the New Testament the Apostle Paul clearly states that not all people today speak in tongues. It seems to me that from the passage here and in other places that when we confess and receive Jesus as Lord and Savior; we are baptized with the Holy Spirit simultaneously. Jesus pictures that event as being filled with living water. If you have been saved then you have the Holy Spirit. Now please follow this reasoning. First let me quote a phrase from Paul's letter to the Philippians:

“⁴³... God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him (Philippians 2:13 / NLT).

Let's not make being baptized or filled with the Holy Spirit overly complicated. I know there are several views concerning this and there are many legitimate views of it. But let's give ourselves a simple test as to whether or not God's Holy Spirit lives in us. Paul said that we can know if God is working in us if we have a desire to obey God and if we are actually doing it. Paul did not say we have the Holy Spirit if we are busy pointing out sin in other people's lives, telling other people what they should be doing, or telling other people what God's will is for their lives.

The test is a simple one. Do I have a desire to obey God? In other words, is God pointing out sin and deficiencies in my life? If He is, am I winning and conquering these sins? That's not to say I am expected to conquer my sins all at once. But I am assuming this. None of us are perfect. In fact I think the Bible's assessment is that we are far from perfect. Let's ask ourselves this. Have we been at war with sin in our lives? Have we seen God enable us to have victory over these sins? And then we need to ask ourselves what sin we are presently at war with in our lives. If we are not at war with sin; and if we do not readily admit we are not perfect; and if God the Holy Spirit is not giving us the desire to overcome sin and pointing out sin; then we have good reason to doubt if we have the Holy Spirit living in us. Let's start there. If we can definitely see God working in our lives; giving us the desire and the power to obey,

then we can go on to the other theological issues concerning the gifts, baptism, and filling of the Holy Spirit. If Jesus came into our hearts when we confessed Him as Lord and Savior; and if God is One, then we can assume that God the Holy Spirit lives in us as well. **JESUS PROMISED THAT AS CERTAIN AS HE WOULD POUR OUT GOD'S LOVE ON THE CROSS, GOD WOULD ALSO POUR OUT HIS LOVE FOR US BY FILLING US WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (ACTS 2:1-21)

Acts 2:1-21 describes the actual event of Pentecost in which we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit. We must remember that **THE HOLY SPIRIT LEADS PEOPLE TO RECEIVE JESUS AS LORD AND SAVIOR.** One of the primary missions of the Holy Spirit is to lead people into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

A. THE ARRIVAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (1-4)

In verses 1-4 we witness the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Having said that, we know the Holy Spirit was present at creation, filled people and prophets with messages from God, and actively worked throughout history. However, here the Holy Spirit steps to center stage. The disciples, about 120 of them, were gathered in Jerusalem praying and waiting in obedience to Jesus. The text is meant to be fast, dramatic, and unexpected. They were quietly praying when all of a sudden; the sound of a rushing wind accompanied by a violent gust of wind blew through the house. I can't even begin to imagine what that felt and sounded like. Perhaps it could be as if we were sitting here praying; and all of a sudden the release of a great thunder clap exploded. Following that it seems as if a huge ball of fire hovered in the air, split into smaller balls of fire that were shaped in what looked like tongues. These tongues of fire came to rest on each one of them. As soon as they did, they all started to speak in tongues as the Holy Spirit enabled them. Again, this is not the purpose of this sermon but I have to quickly add that there are at least three types of tongues that are mentioned in the New Testament. We will see that this manifestation of tongues is the ability to speak in foreign languages. There is also the gift of tongues that consists of somewhat unintelligible speech that is interpreted by another person who has the gift of interpretation. And finally there is another type of tongues that is meant for only private prayer; which is an ecstatic form of prayer.

B. THE UNITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (5-13)

In this case it is the first type of tongues; people speaking in foreign languages. In verses 5-13 we can easily see the purpose of unity in the Holy Spirit. In verse 5 we see that there were God-fearing Jews from all across the known world at the time. There were Jews from Europe, Turkey, modern day Iran, Iraq, and all over that region, Arabia, and all throughout the Northern countries of Africa. There were Jews gathered together in Jerusalem who came to celebrate Passover and stayed over 50 days to celebrate this feast of weeks. There are a couple of things I want us to make note of. First of all, when someone who is filled with joy, the overflow of God's love can't help but spill out onto people around us. Too many times it is the nasty, judgmental, and unhappy Christians that are out there evangelizing. I want more people who are truly happy in Jesus to spread the news about God's love. Secondly the gifts of the Holy Spirit are meant to bring us together and to build us up as a group of believers. Once filled with the Holy Spirit, this group of about 120 plus people spilled out into the street. Now watch this. Every Jew present there heard the Gospel of Jesus being presented in their own native tongues.

These disciples were speaking in all sorts of languages and dialects. Everybody heard the message of salvation through Jesus in language and terms they could all understand. Do you see how that is a direct reversal of the Tower of Babel? At the Tower of Babel, God confused people's language and scattered them. At Pentecost God once again gathered His people and spoke to them the same message of God's love in different languages. God's people were united by God's Son and God's Spirit.

This was an event too miraculous to explain or even understand. The response was much like our response when we come in contact something we can't explain or understand. Some started to make fun of the disciples and said they were drunk. But let us note this was about God gathering together His people to invite them to salvation in Jesus.

C. THE MESSAGE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (14-21)

That really is the message of the Holy Spirit as laid out in verses 14-21. Peter reminded the crowd that it was only nine o'clock in the morning. This was clearly God fulfilling His promise made through the prophet Joel. It is a message of salvation. Look at verse 21. The purpose of this event was so that people could hear God's offer of salvation and to receive God's offer of salvation. We carry this offer with us. Did you ever stop and think that we have been given power and authority to offer salvation to anyone we meet? You and I can go up to anyone and offer them eternal life. That's amazing in itself. But what is even more amazing is that we can fulfill that contract. If someone says to us that they indeed do want to take us up on God's offer of eternal life, we can lead them to Christ and they will receive salvation on the spot. Please, let's get busy with these offers. The big message on this original event of Pentecost was that God was busy offering up salvation simply by receiving Jesus in faith. That message has not changed since. The message is still the same today. We can receive eternal life and become part of God's family simply by giving our lives to Jesus in faith. And here is the unity message of that. If you are a Christian, then you entered the Kingdom of God the same way I did; and from that original day of Pentecost since. We all had to have our sins washed away by the blood of Jesus. Your sins had to be washed away just like my sins had to be washed away. There is nothing you did more than I did to receive salvation. There is nothing I did more than you did to receive salvation. If you are a Christian then we were all forgiven and washed by the same blood Jesus spilled on Calvary. We all received the gift of eternal life by grace through faith. There is no one better or worse than another. We are equal in our heavenly citizenship. There is no difference. We must remember this. **THE HOLY SPIRIT LEADS PEOPLE TO RECEIVE JESUS AS LORD AND SAVIOR.** All Christians have been led to salvation by the Holy Spirit. If you are not yet a Christian, please acknowledge and surrender to the voice and leading of God's Holy Spirit. You are not too bad nor are you too good to receive salvation from Jesus.

THE PURPOSE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (I CORINTHIANS 12:3-13)

In I Corinthians 12:3-13, the Apostle Paul lays out the purpose of the Holy Spirit and His gifts. **THE GIFTS ARE MEANT TO GLORIFY GOD NOT US.** Too many Christians make the Spiritual gifts more about them than about God. The Apostle Paul told the church in Corinth that they were one of the most gifted groups of believers he knew of. And yet they were not using their gifts to glorify God. They were using their gifts to glorify themselves. They were gathering together in cliques and tearing the church apart.

A. THE UNITY OF GOD (3-6)

In verses 3-6 he reminded them about the unity of God. Throughout this passage, the Apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians that there is One Lord, One baptism, One Holy Spirit of God, and One God. We believe in One God; manifest in the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. There is only one way to salvation; by grace through faith. Since these gifts are given by God and since these gifts have supernatural power, they have potential to do great good. But the reverse is true as well. Since they are so powerful, they have the potential to do great harm as well. People who talk about their spiritual gifts tend to talk about their ability to know God's will; not only for their own lives but for others' lives, and the life of the church as well. Their gifts demonstrate to them that they ought to be leaders. Look at verse 4 carefully.

These gifts are meant for service and working. Too many people have overly inflated views of themselves, their spiritual maturity, and their intellect, and their abilities. Some of the statements I have heard people make about God and their relationship with God are incredible. I often wonder how people could ever be confused by them.

B. THE PURPOSE OF THE GIFTS (7-11)

The purpose of the Spiritual gifts is meant to glorify God and God alone. We glorify God by building up the church to unity in love and together carrying out God's purposes. I don't know how we miss this. Jesus said that the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love one another. Jesus said that the world will recognize that we belong to Him by the way we love one another. Jesus pointed out in the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son, that God loves the lost. There is one God; I'm not Him and neither are you. Jesus is the only Head of the church and the Holy Spirit leads us to unity in love. Divisiveness does not come from God's Holy Spirit. Pride, arrogance, and selfishness do not come from God's Holy Spirit. The Spiritual gifts are meant to unite us.

C. THE UNITY OF GOD'S CHURCH (12-13)

In verses 12-13 Paul describes the unity of God's church. This is really hard for us to understand this concept. In our country, if I don't like this church, I go down the street and find myself a new church. If I don't like the pastor at the church I'm in, I just go find a new church where I do like the pastor. If I don't like the music at this church I find another church. I am free to make up my own doctrine and find a church where I agree with the doctrine. In the early church there was only one option. You had to humble yourself and submit to the teachings of the church. If you were disciplined, there was no other place to go. In many countries where the church is being persecuted, Christians only have one option. Therefore, it is hard to find humility and genuine biblical love in churches today. I have the freedom to believe what I believe and go where I want to go. I never have to submit to things I don't agree with. I never have to be humble. I never have to interact in love relationships that I don't want to engage in. I can pretty much gather together with people I agree with and who do what I want them to do. Since there is no way to pull this off in the church institutionally in the United States, every believer has to find a way to put this humble, submissive love into practice. Jesus died because of His love for the church. We too must develop a love for the church. I can't figure that out for you. Each one has to figure this out for ourselves. Having said that, I know that we must get this right. Love is not love only if I love those who I really like. Submission isn't submission until I submit to things I may disagree with. Humility is not humility unless I take something away from what I really consider valuable. Let's try to focus on this first. **THE GIFTS ARE MEANT TO GLORIFY GOD NOT US.**

I wish I had answers to these questions I have raised but I don't. But I do know this. **GOD GAVE US THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO UNIFY AND BUILD UP HIS CHURCH.**

Further, I know this as well. We must intentionally focus on continually allowing God to grow and perfect the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Otherwise it's dangerous to start seeking out and using the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The church in Corinth was hurting one another and destroying the church as they exercised their Spiritual gifts. I have seen many Christians destroy lives and divide churches with their so-called Spiritual gifts. We would do much better to first focus on the fruit of the Holy Spirit first. Listen to how Donald Barnhouse summarizes the fruit of the Holy Spirit. As I read it think if that would be a great atmosphere in which the Holy Spirit could manifest His gifts.

“Love is the key. Joy is love singing. Peace is love resting. Long-suffering is love enduring. Kindness is love's touch. Goodness is love's character. Faithfulness is love's habit. Gentleness is love's self-forgetfulness. Self-control is love holding the reins.”

Only when we understand and practice the fruit of the Holy Spirit can we form a community so filled with love that the gifts of the Holy Spirit can manifest themselves and feel at home.