

Classic Christian Writings:

What happened at Pentecost? There was something that began a new era for the world, a new power of righteousness, a new mission of redemption, and a new basis of fellowship. What was it that made Pentecost the birthday of the Church of Christ? It is not enough to say the Holy Spirit was given. In what sense was He given?

Before Pentecost

The Spirit of God has been active in the world from the beginning. He brooded upon the face of the waters when the earth was without form and void, and the order of creation was the result of His brooding. In the Old Testament He is the creative Agent, Sustainer, and Renewer of the World of Nature. He is the Lord and Giver of life. In Ezekiel's vision the forces and machinery of nature were impelled and controlled by the Spirit of God that dwelt in the wheels....

All through the Old Testament the Holy Spirit is creative, directive energizing. He came upon Moses, Bezaleel, Samson, Gideon, Samuel; and all the Prophets spake by Him. Every creative period had its gift of the Holy Ghost. The manifestations are occasional and special. There is in them a consciousness of limitation and incompleteness. Prophets like Isaiah and Joel foretold a day of fullness of the Spirit which would be the crowning gift of redeeming grace.

In the New Testament the Spirit of God is the active Agent in salvation, but in the Gospels He was "not yet given," and our Lord Himself was straitened until His baptism was accomplished, and He had sent "fire upon the earth" (Luke 12:49-50). The Spirit was in the world, but "not yet given" (John 7:39).

At Pentecost

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came as He had never come before. The signs were not new except in their combination and intensity. The Wind and the Fire and the Tongues had all been associated with the gift of the Spirit, but they were now intensified, enlarged, and distributed to a community of believers. There was a sense of overflowing fullness. Something had happened in the cosmic order that sent forth the Spirit of God in larger measure, with new powers and enlarged opportunities.

He was the gift of God to His Son, and the gift of His Son to the world. He came to fulfill the mission for which Christ came into the world. He is our Lord's Paraclete, His Advocate, and Administrator. His ministry is redemptive and regenerative. In Him the Risen and Ascended Lord finds His enlarged opportunity. The straitening is past. He is exalted far above all rule, and authority, and dominion, and power, and to Him are given all authority in heaven and on earth, and the fullness of "Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:23).

Jesus had said, "It is better for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter, the Paraclete, will not come to you" (John 16:7). The inference is that the presence of the Spirit is better than the bodily presence of Jesus. That is a strange word. Why could not the Spirit come if Jesus did not go away? Why should the coming of the Spirit wait for the going of Jesus? It is not difficult to understand that the Spirit found the fullest opportunity of manifestation in Jesus. To none but Jesus had He ever been able to come "without measure," but why wait to come upon such men as Peter and James and John?

The gift of the Spirit is inseparable from the work of the Son. Is it not true to say that Deity gained new experience of humanity in Jesus Christ? Our great High Priest learned obedience by the things He suffered, and because He is touched with the feeling of our infirmity, He is able to succor and mighty to save. By the sufferings of Christ the Throne of God is the Throne of Grace, where mercy and help are found. If Jesus needed to learn that He might be our Great High Priest, was there not a reason for waiting till that was accomplished before the Spirit could be given?

The Scriptures are reticent about the Holy Spirit, which means that the Spirit is reticent about Himself, but they do make it clear that the Spirit is the crowning gift of redemption through Jesus Christ, and the Spirit was through it all. As the Son learned and thereby entered into the Priesthood of Grace, so the Spirit was prepared to be His Paraclete in the Church and the world.

In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, and when the Day of Pentecost was fully come, "they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it

filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4).

After Pentecost

The change of the Apostles was more wonderful than any of the marvelous portents of the day. The wind and the fire passed, but the transformation remained. It is easy to see the difference in Peter, but it was no greater in him than in the rest. All that Jesus had promised had come to pass. Pentecost interprets the Upper Room. The Paraclete had come, and they were comforted. The Spirit of Truth had come, and they knew. The witness to the Christ had come, and they became witnesses. The Executant of the Kingdom had come in power, and each found himself under authority and speaking as the Spirit gave him utterance.

Fear had gone. They no longer sat with closed windows and bolted doors for fear of the Jews. They feared no one. They were afraid of nothing. They no longer spoke with bated breath. They proclaimed the truth concerning Jesus in the open streets of the city where Jesus had been murdered, and within six weeks of His death. A new power was at work. The Lord Jesus had said that when the Spirit was come He would convict of sin, and righteousness, and judgment; and lo, multitudes were smitten, and three thousand cried for mercy. It was indeed "a great and notable day." The world had never seen such a day. The angels had never seen such a day. Neither had Satan and his hosts of spiritual darkness ever seen such a day.

The vital thing that happened at Pentecost is that the Spirit of Jesus came to abide in the hearts of men in the power of God. That is the difference Pentecost made. "Ye know Him, for He abideth with you and shall be in you" (John 14:17). It is the difference from with to in, plus the difference in Christ by His exaltation and coronation. Through that indwelling Presence Pentecost makes us one with Christ as the Son is one with the Father: "...ye in me, and I in you" (John 14:20). So the Spirit brings the Life of Jesus into the soul; by Him we say, "Christ liveth in me."

What did Pentecost do for men? It brought a new dynamic of righteousness. From the beginning there has been the light lighting every man that cometh into the world; a light the darkness could neither apprehend nor overcome. In the Incarnation of the Word made Flesh the Light came into the world. Pentecost focussed the Light. He convicts the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. There is a new power of conviction. Men were pricked in their hearts as they had never been pricked before. That conviction centers in Christ and is wrought by the Spirit.

Pentecost brought a new fellowship. That is the abiding miracle. Community of the Spirit of Jesus issued in community of life in His Name. The Kingdom of God henceforth is a new theocracy, permeated, dominated, sanctified in the Spirit of Pentecost. The new thing is not in the wind and fire, or the gift of tongues, but in the possession of the Spirit by each for the good of all.

That which happened at Pentecost is the biggest thing that ever happened. And now the biggest question of all is, has it happened to you and me? Have we received the Holy Ghost?