

Journey to Pentecost

THE PRODUCER

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It is the role of a music or film producer to have the mastery of the whole message, to be able to envision the finished product and direct every stage of production to that end. He can sit at a console and combine the discreet elements and instruments and scenes into a meaningful and moving product.

Who is producing your life's song and story? Or, to ask it from another angle: How can I fulfill my destiny? How can I become the person God made me to be and wants me to be? Check this out:

“Don't be foolish, but be wise by understanding what the will of the Lord is. And don't get drunk with wine, which is excessive indulgence, but be continually being filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and songs of the Spirit, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord, giving thanks to God the Father always and for everyone and everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”
(Ephesians 5:17-21)

To avoid being foolish and, instead, be wise; to have a song in my heart, thanks on my lips, and enjoy strong fellowship in the church—I need to be under the influence every day. Not under the influence of alcohol, which leads to a shallow counterfeit of these activities, but under the influence of the Holy Spirit—continually.

The very heart of this passage is this phrase: *“Be continually being filled with the Holy Spirit.”* We need the Holy Spirit *upon us* every day. Not merely His watchful care, but His close fellowship and empowering influence. Every day.

Not an Option

Some propose that the baptism with the Holy Spirit is optional, in that it is not required in order to be born again. Of course it is true that the baptism with the Spirit is not necessary to the new birth; in fact, the new birth is prerequisite to the baptism. But that doesn't make the Spirit baptism optional or unnecessary. As we read earlier today, Jesus told His followers to *“Wait... until.”* Clearly, the implication of that instruction is necessity: Don't proceed without; wait until.

The empowering baptism with the Holy Spirit is a practical necessity for those who intend to follow Jesus Christ.

And this is not “new theology” or recent doctrine, but a long-standing principle in the Bible. Let me show you the background of this teaching.

Pentecost

Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Why that day? Pentecost was the name given by Greek-speaking Jews to their ancient Feast of Weeks, because the Greek word *pentecoste* means fiftieth, and that celebration took place on the fiftieth day after Passover.

This celebration of the Jewish calendar was known as the Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22), because it concluded a seven-week period of reflection about their deliverance from slavery. It was also known as the Festival of Harvest (Exodus 23:16), or the Day of First Fruits (Numbers 28:26), because it coincided with the beginning of the wheat harvest. The people celebrated that gracious provision of God by bringing to Him the first fruits of their fields for that year—a tithe offering.

According to Exodus 23, there were three annual festivals which every Jewish man was required to attend: The Feast of Unleavened Bread (following Passover), the Feast of Weeks, or of Harvest (following Pentecost), and the Feast of Ingathering, or of Shelters (following the last grain harvest).

“Each year you must celebrate three festivals in my honor. First, celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread. For seven days the bread you eat must be made without yeast, just as I commanded you. Celebrate this festival annually at the appointed time in early spring, in the month of Abib, for that is the anniversary of your departure from Egypt. No one may appear before me without an offering.

“Second, celebrate the Festival of Harvest, when you bring me the first crops of your harvest. Finally, celebrate the Festival of the Final Harvest at the end of the harvest season, when you have harvested all the crops from your fields. At these three times each year, every man in Israel must appear before the Sovereign, the LORD.” (Exodus 23:14-17)

Correspondingly, there are three major points of celebration for every Christian: the new birth (our Passover), the baptism with the Holy Spirit (our Pentecost), and the rapture of the church (our final harvest). None of these is optional; they are divinely prescribed events, to which every Christian must attend.

The Early Church did not have the pushback or division about the baptism with the Holy Spirit that we know in the church world today, two millennia later. Growing naturally from the Jewish background, the baptism with the Holy Spirit, like the new birth, was a normative Christian experience for three hundred years. It wasn't until Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire and required all citizens to become Christians, regardless of

personal belief or practice, that common Christian doctrines and practices became points of general contention. This was the genesis of today's confusion.

Illustrated Truth

However, the Word of God has not changed, and for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, the illustrations are persuasive. Let's look briefly at three.

1) In Matthew 25, Jesus told a parable concerning the Kingdom of Heaven in which ten young women—bridesmaids—played the central roles.

¹ *"Then the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ The five who were foolish didn't take enough olive oil for their lamps, ⁴ but the other five were wise enough to take along extra oil. ⁵ When the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep.*

⁶ *"At midnight they were roused by the shout, 'Look, the bridegroom is coming! Come out and meet him!'*

⁷ *"All the bridesmaids got up and prepared their lamps. ⁸ Then the five foolish ones asked the others, 'Please give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out.'*

⁹ *"But the others replied, 'We don't have enough for all of us. Go to a shop and buy some for yourselves.'*

¹⁰ *"But while they were gone to buy oil, the bridegroom came. Then those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was locked. ¹¹ Later, when the other five bridesmaids returned, they stood outside, calling, 'Lord! Lord! Open the door for us!'*

¹² *"But he called back, 'Believe me, I don't know you!'*

¹³ *"So you, too, must keep watch! For you do not know the day or hour of my return."*

(Matthew 25:1-13)

How disappointing were His words to those unsuspecting maidens, *"Believe me, I don't know you!"* Are we, too, in danger of being left out of the wedding supper of the Lamb for lack of oil? How shall you and I have the alertness to prepare and persist until the return of Jesus? The answer is in having more than enough oil—a common symbol of the Holy Spirit. In other words, being continually being filled with the Spirit. That is wisdom and safety. Which group describes you?

2) Jesus told another parable about the wedding feast of a prince, to which those who had been specially invited found other things to occupy their time. The host—the king—was so incensed by their indifference that he instead invited everyone who was willing—both bad and good—to be his guests. When the king arrived, he noticed one man who had not prepared himself, and was not wearing wedding clothes.

“‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?’ But the man had no reply. Then the king said to his aides, ‘Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.” (Matthew 22:12-14)

Much to his dismay, the man was ejected from the festivities. Are we, too, in danger of being thrown out for having the wrong clothing? What is the proper attire?

Just before ascending back to Heaven, the Lord Jesus told His followers, *“behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”* (Luke 24:49) This is the proper attire for those who hope to attend a heavenly wedding. Is this you?

3) Jesus warned of false prophets and false disciples. *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven—only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons and do many powerful deeds?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Go away from me, you lawbreakers!’”* (Matthew 7:21-23)

Again, those awful words, *“I never knew you,”* heard by many unsuspecting ears! Are we, too, in danger of rejection in the end because (though we exercise spiritual gifts) we lack spiritual fruit? How shall we avoid a mistake of such tragic proportions?

The answer, again, is to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit, because He is not only the Giver of supernatural gifts, but He is the Producer of spiritual fruit. Is this where you live?

“The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

We need the Holy Spirit every day, because He is the Great Producer.

That means, we must be prepared to receive and preserve what the Holy Spirit produces.

Internally: Spiritual Fruit

Internally, the Holy Spirit produces what we call spiritual fruit. The product of His activity in our lives is the character of Jesus Christ, if we will receive and preserve it. These nine traits—*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*—are the picture of Jesus’ way—the motivation and manner of His words and actions.

Spiritual fruit is paramount (more important than gifts). That is evident from Jesus’ words to the many on the Day of Judgment—they had gifts, but lacked fruit. You must concentrate here.

We are inclined to give more attention to spiritual gifts than spiritual fruit, since they suggest popularity and immediate satisfaction and demand less discipline. Gifts will gain a crowd for a time, as they did for Jesus (though, in the end, everyone left Him), but fruit will gain the esteem of friends for life.

As some wise person said, “If you have integrity, nothing else matters. If you don’t have integrity, nothing else matters.”

Worry less about your spiritual gifts and more about your spiritual fruit, because if you have the fruit, the gifts will almost naturally begin to flow.

On the other hand, whenever you concentrate on the gifts, you risk running ahead of the Lord and developing pride and arrogance, stunting the development of spiritual fruit.

So, first and foremost, spiritual fruit—but not to the neglect of spiritual gifts! Both were designed and are given by God and are good—in proper order and balance.

There’s a wonderful picture of this in the Old Testament, where God is instructing Moses concerning the design of the High Priest’s robe.

““Make the robe that is worn with the ephod from a single piece of blue cloth, with an opening for Aaron’s head in the middle of it. Reinforce the opening with a woven collar so it will not tear. Make pomegranates out of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and attach them to the hem of the robe, with gold bells between them. The gold bells and pomegranates are to alternate all around the hem.” (Exodus 28:31-34)

The bells had a very practical purpose. When the High Priest ministered in the inner sanctuary of the Lord, out of the people’s sight, he was in danger of being killed by God if he did not perform his ministry appropriately. In fact, the people commonly tied a long rope around one ankle so that, if he did die, they could drag his body out, because no one else was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies. And you wonder if there is ever pressure in the ministry?

The ringing of the bells was the signal that the priest was still actively ministering—and, therefore, still alive!

The fruit of the Spirit, like pomegranates, are sweet to the taste and full of reproductive seeds, to encourage fruitfulness in others. That’s why Jesus taught us to treat others in the way we wish to be treated—not because it guarantees a return, but because it *inspires* a return from those who are paying attention.

Jesus taught this: *“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”* (Luke 6:38)

But give *what*? Generosity is an inner quality that is invisible until something is done with it. Only when you act on it, does it become noticeable and effective.

Externally: Spiritual Gifts

This is the role of spiritual gifts: to demonstrate spiritual fruit in ways that can be seen and appreciated.

The High priest’s robe, hemmed with golden bells and pomegranates, is a picture of the divine balance of fruit and gifts in the Christian life. Gifts, like bells, are the signal of ministry activity, and remind us that our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, is still active in His ministry through the Church.

It has been said that one can estimate the number of apples a tree will bear, but it is impossible to estimate the number of apples a seed will bear. It is this power of the seed that is in the fruit of the Spirit—the power to reproduce, immeasurably.

Trees full of fruit are fragrant and attractive, but fruit trees without fruit are pointless (remember the fig tree that Jesus cursed?).

So the gifts of the Spirit are to be used only for godly purposes and only in godly ways. Spiritual gifts that lack the fragrance of spiritual fruit are to be spurned. Remember, the reproductive power is not in the gift; it is in the fruit.

Miracles alone do not produce faith, but miracles wrought in love do.

Let this be the sum of the matter (say it aloud): Spiritual fruit are only seen through spiritual gifts; spiritual gifts are only effective through spiritual fruit.

The Holy Spirit is the Great Producer. We need Him. Every day. Apart from Him, the Christian life is pointless, misleading, and frustrating. But as we are *“continually being filled”* with the Spirit’s presence and influence, this life is meaningful, fulfilling, and effective.

That is why we celebrate Pentecost! And that is why we are Pentecostal.

How about you?