

## **PENTECOST FIRE – 5 UNLEASHING THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT... AGAIN!**

*When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force—no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.*

From this now-familiar passage, we will discover the 5<sup>th</sup> answer to the question: WHAT THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME TO DO. Along with Convicting us of sin, convincing us of the truth, Glorifying Jesus and bringing us Power I offer to you today that:

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME TO PROVIDE US GIFTS**

You see it at the very end of the passage: *they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.* Well, my friends, this same Spirit is still prompting us today...this same Spirit is still spreading through our ranks, this same Spirit is still providing us with Gifts...and I'd like to discuss this purpose this morning by taking a look at a number of the mistakes I've made concerning what I've believed (and taught) through the years regarding this same Holy Spirit of God. Before we embark, listen to another description of this purpose:

*There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. I Cor. 12:4-7*

I know I've made hundreds more than these, but here are six of the most egregious mistakes I've made regarding my understanding, teaching, and practice of ministry when it concerns the Holy Spirit.

### **MISTAKES I'VE MADE REGARDING SPIRITUAL GIFTS:**

#### **1. DISTINGUISHING THE GIFTS FROM TALENTS/ABILITIES/SKILLS**

Through the years, I've believed and taught that Spiritual Gifts are uniquely different than our natural talents, abilities and skills; I'm beginning to rethink that.

I still believe that there is a difference, but it's not as distinctive as I and others have tried to make it. I say this not to 'dumb down' the unique 'theology' of spiritual gifts, but to try and unite the inevitable divide that exists in our minds between the sacred and the secular, the spiritual and the physical, the holy and the unholy. For too long, I've mistakenly espoused that ones innately natural abilities come to us at birth through the wiring of our unique DNA; while the Spiritual Gifts come only to us at the point of our rebirth in Christ, and then supersede any other of our natural abilities. Again, some of that is true, but most is a pharisaical smokescreen used to make us "Christians" feel superior to those 'yet-to-be-believers'.

I offer to us today, that our human make up is not so definitively divided between the sacred and secular, between the human and the holy, between the spiritual and the physical. I offer to you that we are creatures of God, imbued with many natural abilities, human skills, even unusual talents; but we are also created with Spiritual DNA that includes at least some of the Spiritual Gifts that are mentioned in the Scripture.

Why do I feel this is important? If this theory is true, then we can't as easily dismiss our responsibilities to utilize our spiritual giftedness, claiming it is somehow not in sync with our natural wiring. We are whole people, spiritual, physical, mental, emotional, and relational people; and we have been given natural abilities, and spiritual gifts, EACH from the heart and hand of God as GIFTS! So we better appreciate and use them accordingly!

## **2. LIMITING THE GIFTS TO ONLY THOSE WHO KNOW JESUS CHRIST**

Obviously this is related to number one, but I've mistakenly believed and taught, (again I think out of a misguided sense of spiritual pride), that only believers in Jesus Christ receive Spiritual Gifts. What I'm thinking now is that all people, even agnostics, atheists, and those who follow Satan, are still created by God, loved by God, and in some as yet to be discovered ways; still gifted by God.

Granted, it takes the convicting, convincing, glorifying, empowerment of the Holy Spirit to bring us to our senses, and bring spiritual understanding to our lives. But I think it's too elitist for us to believe that we have some corner on the market of God's Spiritual Gifts, because we were born in America, born in a Christian home, or born in the Church, or born as members of the white race; while others less fortunate than we, are somehow less spiritual or less gifted!

Yes, there is part of the Spiritual world/life that only gets unlocked for us when we acknowledge and accept Jesus Christ, but His gifts are there, latent though they be, in the inner being of all persons; waiting to be given birth through the resurrection faith which brings that understanding to life.

### **3. RESTRICTING THE USE OF GIFTS TO MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH**

Of all my mistakes, this may be the greatest. For too long I believed that Spiritual Gifts are only to be used in ministry for the church, by the church, with the church, and in the church! I was wrong! By opening up our understanding that anything we do, when done in the name and for the glory of Jesus; can rightly be considered ministry, then how could the use of the gifts which are a natural part of our spiritual being; be restricted to use in the church...it just doesn't make sense?

This is important for a couple reasons, not the least of which is that each of us is called to be in ministry, and each of us is uniquely created and gifted by God to fulfill whatever that ministry is to which God has called us. We are not called to engage in some ministry that exceeds our abilities, but to use all our skills, talents, and gifts to be the kind of people God expects us to be, and do the kind of things God empowers us to do! God is not likely to gift someone with the ability to sing and dance and make music; then place them somewhere those things can't be shared.

God is also not likely to call you to something outside your areas of giftedness; oh, occasionally the need may exceed your gifts, and you'll be asked to just do your best; but for the most part, God matches our gifts, with the needs we can meet, through the ministries we can do.

I say all this to encourage all of us to be engaged in some ministry. Some may be in the church, but more will be in your schools, your homes, your businesses, your leisure activities. And when you say yes, to whatever ministry God brings your way; just know that God will also provide all the gifts you need to faithfully and effectively accomplish that ministry.

#### **4. ELIMINATING MANY GIFTS BY FOCUSING ON A FEW GIFTS**

I have to confess, I grew up in the faith wishing and wanting, even praying for the Gift of Speaking in Tongues. I know I'm not alone. For this gift and a few other glamorous ones have received most of the press (and most of it bad). By focusing on any one or even just a few gifts, we close ourselves from others that God may want us to discover within ourselves, or receive as 'special' promptings from God.

We must remember that the purpose of the Holy Spirit is to Glorify Jesus, and this pertains to His gifts as well. The gifts were never intended to make us look good, or holy or spiritual, but to make Jesus look good. Anytime we determine which gifts are 'coolest' and seek after them, we are doing so for the wrong reason, and we are going to miss the greater good, of just receiving...the gifts God wants us to have.

This is important for us as individual disciples, and as a church to appreciate right now. I believe we are beginning to enjoy the cusp of a new chapter in our history that will include a new experience with the Holy Spirit, and also the Spirit's gifts. I want us as individuals to be as open to the gifts of servanthood, giving, and hospitality as we are to the gifts of faith, healing and miracles.

I believe God is poised to pour out His Spirit in new ways, if we'll not restrict those blessings, by forcing them into the old wineskins of 'the way we've always done it.'

It will require a risk on our part, to open ourselves to new things, new ways, new thoughts, new experiences, even new gifts; outside the box of our past. But what could be more exciting than seeing God use us to move this church and this community into that kind of future?

##### **5. BELIEVING THAT THE GIFTS WERE ONLY FOR OTHER CHURCHES**

Being raised a life-long Methodist, yet exposed along the way to many different charismatic expressions of the faith has left me at times wondering if the Gifts are only for those emotionally immature who need some extra 'shot in the arm' to keep them going. We Methodists being warned from John Wesley to avoid extreme 'enthusiasm' have missed the boat on too many occasions. Yes, we've been privy to revivals throughout the years, and yes we have built and created an organizational monster, and yes, we've educated ourselves, and our people; and yet here we are in 2008, needing one thing more than any other...the POWER of the Holy Spirit to arrest us and revive us once again!

The Holy Spirit is not the possession of any one church or class of churches, or denomination, or even any single group of people. The Holy Spirit is bigger than any of us can comprehend and understand, but we dare not let our intellectual skepticism keep us from being apprehended by the Holy Spirit...again! The Holy Spirit is not bound by buildings, doctrines, policies, or unbelief! The Holy Spirit is unable to be prevented and unable to be orchestrated in any way except our unwillingness to open the door to that same Spirit.

For many years I've believed that God wanted, and has even 'called' me to pastor an authentically charismatic United Methodist Church... ..and I hope I don't have to be appointed somewhere else to do that!

## **6. JUSTIFYING MY FEAR THAT THE GIFTS ARE SCARY AND UNNECESSARY**

Last but not least, I've mistakenly allowed my fears that the Spirit itself and the gifts specifically are scary, and unnecessary. I'm learning that nothing could be further from the truth. Yes, the unknown is hard for us to process, whether death, new city streets, or an unfamiliar TV guide; the unknown is difficult for us to incorporate into our lives.

All I can offer you is this; The Holy Spirit doesn't want to hurt us, but to help us. The Holy Spirit has no intention of embarrassing us, but blessing us. The Holy Spirit has not gifted us to punish us but to fulfill our being. The Holy Spirit has not come to make our lives miserable, uncomfortable, or ill at ease; but the Spirit has come to make us complete!

I want to encourage you, whatever age you are doesn't matter; to open yourself to God's Spirit. In your prayer times or quiet moments, just say "yes", to whatever the Holy Spirit might be prompting in you. Some of you think you are not ready, you've not been on this journey long enough...you're wrong...there is no time like the present to get more of God's joy in your life, by experiencing the vastness of God's Spirit and the personal giftedness He has in store for you. Some of you may think you are too spiritual, too 'already together' and too 'already mature' for God to do anything new in you. You are also wrong. None of us have arrived, all of us have needs, most of us could do more, many of us need to get unstuck, humbled and back in line with God's will through God's Spirit.

As much as can, I want to assure you there is nothing to be afraid of. I certainly don't know it all, I've probably got more mistakes to undo; but what I'm learning is good, helpful, and satisfying. Don't take my word for it...just be open. Let us pray.

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2. \_\_\_\_\_ THE GIFTS TO ONLY THOSE WHO KNOW \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ THE USE OF GIFTS TO MINISTRY IN THE \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. \_\_\_\_\_ MANY GIFTS BY FOCUSING ON A \_\_\_\_\_ GIFTS
  
5. \_\_\_\_\_ THAT THE GIFTS WERE ONLY FOR OTHER \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. \_\_\_\_\_ MY FEAR THAT THE GIFTS ARE \_\_\_\_\_ AND \_\_\_\_\_