

3 Spiritual Truths Every Pentecostal Should Live By

One of the most fundamental features of the Pentecostal movement is that it is rooted in an experience called “the baptism of the Holy Spirit.” Along with this experience comes what is called “the manifestations of the Holy Spirit” which are meant to be experienced and encountered by the believer. What makes the Pentecostal tradition different from other Christian traditions? Non-Pentecostal traditions believe that an individual can encounter God when they experience salvation, regeneration and sanctification, but they very seldom believe that the normal Christian life is meant to be filled with “charismatic” experiences akin to what the early church experienced in the book of Acts.

Pentecostals believe that the operation of the Holy Spirit’s gifts and power in the believer’s life is for today. Does this make us superior to other Christians who do not believe like this? No! Some of the greatest contributions to Christianity throughout history came from people that did not refer to having had an experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. For example, Martin Luther was instrumental in sparking the Reformation. John Calvin played an important role in systematizing theology. George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards were largely responsible for the First Great Awakening in the 13 colonies that would later become the United States. And of course, in more recent times, Billy Graham has shared the gospel with countless millions.

Whether a person experiences the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit does not necessarily determine their willingness or ability to be used by God. So, why then is this experience that Pentecostal Christianity highlights even needed today? The answer is that it best reflects the Christianity that was in operation during the time of the early apostolic church,

the community of believers that was closest to the time of Christ and that actually had relationship with Him. It was a community that operated in the supernatural power of God, not in thought, but in reality.

Right here in the United States, in the early 1900s, God sovereignly revived this “early-church” Christianity. From the time of the early church fathers up until then, there were very few instances, or movements, of Christianity that reflected a Christian experience similar to that of the first-century church. In the early 1900s, different movements began to spring up across this country that eventually led to a reawakening of what is referred to as “the experience of Pentecost,” which occurred when the disciples were baptized in the Holy Spirit while praying in the upper room. This in turn led to the formation of several Pentecostal churches: the Assemblies of God, the Church of God, the Foursquare Church and several other smaller ones. It was clear at the time that God was doing something powerful and dynamic among His people. And thus, what came to be known as modern Pentecostalism began.

So, why is this important today? It is because God interacts personally with His people and desires to have His Spirit flowing through them. This is something that is meant to be experiential, not just conceptual. For the believer, Christianity is supposed to be an ongoing, living experience, not just a set of doctrines or teachings.

God is supernatural, infinitely beyond just “the natural.” Thus, when an individual encounters the Holy Spirit, that experience will: 1) change their life, 2) open them up to living life in the Spirit of God, which in turn will lead them to 3) being able to live an effective and empowered Christian life.

Because we live in a world that is so filled with darkness, trial and temptation, it is more than necessary to be

empowered by God to be His instrument. In fact, words cannot even properly express how important this is. Actually, the experience of the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives is what enabled the disciples to "turn the world [of their time] upside down" (Acts 17:6).

In Acts 2, the disciples and the church of that time experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit first hand while praying in the upper room after the ascension of Jesus into heaven. One experience with God changed them forever. Previous to their Acts 2 encounter, they did not have God's vision for what He intended them to accomplish. They did not have the boldness that would be required for the spread of the gospel; in fact, they were living in fear. After they experienced the Holy Spirit in Pentecost, they had the vision and boldness to proclaim the gospel and make disciples wherever they went.

The book of Acts shows us that though they experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the upper room on Pentecost, at various time they were refilled. This truth is very important as it applies to Pentecostals living today. God wants us

- 1) to encounter Him in a way that changes our entire lives
- 2) that opens us up to living life in the Spirit of God
- 3) enables us to live an empowered Christian life that we may preach the gospel boldly and unashamedly

And then, after encountering Him like that, He then wants us to encounter him again and again, and again and again (I think you get the point).

So, you may be reading this and thinking it all sounds very good. And it is. However, unfortunately, there is a problem. In recent times, due in part to excess, poor doctrine and an overemphasis on emotionalism, many Pentecostals have shifted away from true experiential Pentecostalism. In today's world, this departure can be seen in many postings on YouTube, false

teaching and various forms of even “supposedly Spirit-filled Christianity” floating around on the Internet, and an American culture based largely upon self-gratification and which has no real interest in arriving at the truth. This cultural influence has caused many Pentecostal Christians to become disinterested about “actually experiencing” Pentecostal Christianity. After all, the world offers a seemingly endless multitude of easily acquirable “other” experiences.

Pentecost was never meant to be shaped by the unbelieving surrounding culture. Yet, today, in many instances, unfortunately it has been. There has even been a shift among many “so-called” Pentecostals towards not only spiritual dullness but a kind of cynicism with regards to what might be referred to as “old-time Pentecostalism” as being too “hyper” and emotionally excessive.

I am the first person to promote discernment, but sometimes discernment can be a mask for cynicism. I have spent countless hours researching what could be considered “false fire.” And sadly, there are more “false fire” videos on YouTube and across the Internet than “real fire.” But that does not mean that God does not still desire that His people experience His Spirit in a real and life-changing way. It is true that ego, wrong motive and spiritual ignorance can cause experiential Pentecostalism to become absurd and sometimes outright heretical. However, we as Pentecostals should not shy away from a Christianity that promotes and delivers an experience with God. It is part of the DNA of the Pentecostal movement. If the Bible is kept as your standard, if you keep wise counsel in your life and if you aren’t trying to experience God to further your own agenda but rather His, there is no reason to fear and avoid experiential, Pentecostal Christianity.

The other issue hindering genuine experiential Pentecostalism from occurring within churches is that it is something that cannot be controlled by man. Part of man’s sinful nature is

that he craves control. Pastors are not immune to this temptation and neither are normal churchgoers. It is a legitimate observation that people tend to fear giving up control. However, when control is given to God, there is no need to fear. In light of all of the commands to “fear not” in Scripture, it is clear that God never wants us to make choices based upon fear.

Of course, a myriad of questions arises when talking about giving up control to the Holy Spirit. Questions like, “What happens if I allow room for people to encounter the Holy Spirit in my church and someone does something crazy?” Or, “What happens if I encounter God, and He changes things in my life that I don’t want changed?” For the pastor and churchgoer alike, it comes down to trusting God’s faithfulness. If we seek to encounter God and give Him the opportunity to take control, it will result in our good, not our woe.

It is extremely important for Pentecostals to re-embrace a truly experiential Christianity. We can’t just talk about Acts 2, we can’t just have good doctrine about Acts 2, and we can’t just “hope” to experience Acts 2, we actually have to experience it. We need to encounter the Holy Spirit. We are in unique times. More than ever, there needs to be boldness. More than ever, we need to walk in the Spirit. And more than ever, we need empowerment from the Holy Spirit.

So, Pentecostal believer, I would challenge you with this. Don’t allow spiritual dullness, deadness or cynicism to keep you from encountering the Holy Spirit in the way that He desires. Don’t allow contentment with past experiences with God to make you too content to seek Him in the present. Don’t be afraid to experience God in new ways. Hold experiences up to the light of Scripture. Don’t let fear of departing from truth keep you from true experiential Pentecostalism. It is always rooted in the truth of Scripture and will not lead to heresy. Truth is not meant to only be thought about in the head, it is meant to be experienced in the heart and in the

Spirit. If you humbly and sincerely seek after God, you will find Him. Jeremiah 29:13 says, "You shall seek Me and then find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." {eoa}

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