

There Is No True Pentecost Without the Women

Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, makes it clear that women as well as men were in the upper room when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost. He says, "These all [the Twelve] continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, *with the women* and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers" (Acts 1:14, author's emphasis).

It is also clear from this narrative that there was no segregated seating based on sex. Neither is there any indication of special seating according to rank. They mingled freely together as they prayed and waited for the promise of the Father to be fulfilled (Acts 1:4).

God Made No Distinction at Pentecost

When the Holy Spirit finally came on the day of Pentecost, God made no distinction based on sex. Women received the Holy Spirit in the very same way as the men.

In describing the events that transpired, Luke says that after the sound of a rushing mighty wind, "There appeared to them tongues as of fire, being distributed and resting *on each of them*" (Acts 2:3, author's emphasis). Bill Fish, pastor and Bible teacher from Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, notes that God did not distribute blue tongues and pink tongues. The tongues of fire that sat upon Mary Magdalene and the women were no different than the tongues of fire that sat upon Peter, James and John.

Yes, women were given the gift of the Holy Spirit in the very same manner as men. Luke goes on to say, "And they were *all filled* with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to speak" (Acts 2:4, author's emphasis).

When a multitude gathered and asked what was the meaning of this, Peter pointed them to the prophecy of the Old Testament prophet Joel, who had predicted a time when the Holy Spirit would be given to all God's people, including women. Peter said, "But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days it shall be,' says God, 'that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons *and your daughters* shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams" . Even on My menservants *and maidservants* I will pour out My Spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:16-18, author's emphasis).

Spirit-Filled Women Were a Powerful Force in the Early Church

The women who came out of the upper room were a powerful force in early Christianity. This is evidenced by the fact that Saul of Tarsus, in his persecution of the church, targeted both men and women. Luke says, "But Saul ravaged the church, entering house by house and dragging out both men *and women* and committing them to prison" (Acts 8:3, author's emphasis).

When Saul (who later became Paul the apostle) expanded the persecution outside Israel's borders to Damascus, he obtained written authorization from the high priest to carry out his task of stamping out this fledgling Jesus movement. Interestingly, he made certain the documents stated that he could arrest women as well as men and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial. Luke says, "Saul, still breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and requested letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any there of the Way, *either men or women*, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1-2, author's emphasis).

Saul knew that if he had any chance of stopping the Jesus movement, he would have to target the women as well as the men. This shows that those Spirit-filled women from the upper room were a powerful force in early Christianity.

The Holy Spirit Elevates Women

In her book, *In the Spirit We're Equal*, my wife, Dr. Susan Hyatt, documented that wherever there has been a new Pentecost—a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit—women have emerged alongside men as leaders. This is because such movements attach more value to one's spiritual gift and call than to institutional concerns such as sex, race and education.

In the great 18th-century Methodist revival, women were filled with the Holy Spirit and became powerful preachers and teachers. John Wesley reluctantly began commissioning them to preach because he could not deny that the Holy Spirit had anointed them to proclaim the Good News.

When someone challenged him as to why he commissioned women as well as uneducated men to preach the gospel, Wesley replied, "Because God's owns them in the conversion of sinners and who am I that I should withstand God?"

Women at Azusa Street

Women also emerged to the forefront of the early Pentecostal revival. Lucy Farrow was a mentor and pastor to William Seymour in Houston before he went to Los Angeles. According to "Mother Cotton," no one was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues at Azusa until Lucy Farrow followed him to Los Angeles and began praying and laying her hands on the people.

Many women were filled with the Holy Spirit at the Azusa Revival and went forth as evangelists, pastors, missionaries and church planters. William Seymour tied what was happening in the lives of these women to Pentecost. The January 1908 edition of the *Apostolic Faith*, the official publication of the revival, carried this statement:

"Before Pentecost, the woman could only go into the 'court of

the women' and not into the inner court. But when our Lord poured out Pentecost He brought all those faithful women with the other disciples into the upper room and God baptized them all in the same room and made no difference. All the women received the anointed oil of the Holy Ghost and were able to preach the same as men. They both were co-workers in Eden and both fell into sin; so they both have to come together and work in the Gospel."

The Key to a New Pentecost

Although some will put up a doctrinal argument against women preaching, teaching and exercising leadership in the church, Jesus made it clear that such opposition may be rooted in a hard heart. For example, when He appeared to the 11, after appearing first to Mary Magdalene and the women, He rebuked them for not believing the women's testimony. Mark says, "Afterward He appeared to the eleven as they sat at supper, and He reprimanded them for their unbelief *and hardness of heart*, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen" (Mark 16:14, author's emphasis).

Today's church cannot continue to marginalize women and expect to see a new Pentecost. I am convinced that if we are to see a new earthshaking outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our day, we must open our doors and our hearts to the gifts and callings of the sisters in our midst. {eo}

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