

Wind and Fire: The Double Portion of Pentecost

Very few evangelical Christians today observe the traditional church calendar. Sure, we know when to celebrate Christmas and Easter, but more obscure holidays like Epiphany or All Saints Day have long been forgotten—usually because we consider them “too Catholic.”

But we have a strange way of treating Pentecost.. Even those of us who wear the Pentecostal label rarely commemorate it, either because we forget to count the weeks after Easter or because we don't place any importance on a date that gets lost somewhere between Mother's Day and Memorial Day.

That's odd when you consider that the Apostle Paul and the early disciples attached great significance to Pentecost. During his third missionary journey, Paul hurried to reach Jerusalem in time for Pentecost (see Acts 20:16), and he told the Corinthians that he planned to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost (see 1 Cor. 16:8). Paul had Pentecost on his mind; he marked time with it; it provided a sacred rhythm for his spiritual life. He was, without a doubt, the ultimate Pentecostal.

Before the coming of Christ, Pentecost was a joyful Jewish festival celebrating the wheat harvest 50 days after the first fruits offering. But the Old Covenant version of this holiday was just a foreshadowing of the great spiritual ingathering that occurred after the dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the first followers of Jesus. Pentecost was heaven's inauguration ceremony for the church, complete with rushing wind, flames of fire and an astounding display of glossolalia. In that moment the men and women gathered in the upper room were visibly endued with supernatural power—and 3,000 people were converted in response to Peter's preaching.

Pentecost was no small miracle. The fire that's described in the second chapter of Acts was not unlike the fire that fell on Mount Carmel during Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal. But the fire of Pentecost came not to consume Elijah's soggy wood but to set surrendered hearts ablaze. It came to show us that in the era of grace, God fills frail human vessels with His powerful Spirit—and anoints a new priesthood that is not based on race, gender, age or economic status.

How desperately we need a fresh anointing of Pentecost today. But if we want it, we must go back to the original formula.

Before John the Baptist was beheaded he prophesied that God would endue His church with power. He announced that Jesus Christ would give His church a double portion of His Spirit. John said: "He [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matt. 3:11, NASB, emphasis added). When the day of Pentecost arrived, sure enough, both wind and fire were evident. True Pentecost has both.

We've known the wind during the past 40 years of the charismatic movement. We have felt "times of refreshing" in the Holy Spirit's renewing presence. We've enjoyed His healing, learned about the gifts of the Spirit, claimed His prosperity and received His supernatural power.

Some of us have spent a lot of time on the floors of our churches, soaking in His miraculous anointing. We love to shake, bake, rattle and roll. We saturate and marinate in the anointing. We experience Holy Ghost goose bumps. And sometimes, because of our immaturity, we use the Holy Spirit's power to feed selfish desires or meet emotional needs.

But genuine Pentecost does not consist of wind alone. It's not just about noise or feelings. John said Jesus would baptize us in fire as well as power. What is the fire of the Spirit?

Fire has a refining element. John the Baptist said: "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear

His threshing floor; and he will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12). When it comes to Pentecost, holiness is not a side issue. It is the essence of the Holy Spirit's work. When He comes in power, He also comes to burn up the sin in our lives. He comes with conviction, searching our motives, uprooting our unforgiveness and shattering our pride.

Our problem is that we treat the whole scene in Acts 2 as if it were a party. We want hoopla instead of the fear of God. We spend all our time splashing in the shallow end of His river when He has deeper things for us. We are afraid to embrace Jesus' winnowing fork, and we resist when the fire of His Spirit comes to burn up our selfishness.

My Bible says wind and fire appeared on the day of Pentecost. We will not see Pentecost-style harvest without both. I pray you will ask for the double portion. {eoa}

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