

Spiritual Gifts, Spiritual Fruit and the Evidence of True Pentecost

Pentecost's

power is more than wind, fire and supernatural hoopla. Without love it is just noise.

What's

the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word "Pentecostal"?

- A. . . A woman with a beehive hairdo, support hose, Granny shoes and no makeup?
- B. . . Someone rolling on the floor while speaking in tongues uncontrollably?
- C. . . A slick-haired televangelist in a white suit who begs for donations?
- D. . . A sour-faced Christian who looks like he just sucked all the juice out of a lemon?
- E. A sincere Christian who passionately loves God and people and believes in the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit?

I

wish we all could answer E., but we Pentecostals have an image problem. I'm not ashamed of the word itself, but I don't use it as a label because the bad stereotypes (A., B., C. and D.) have just about ruined it for the rest of us.

Many people associate Pentecostals with dry legalism, fanaticism, charlatanism

and downright hatefulness.

“Unselfish

love, generosity, brotherly affection and sincere kindness is just as much a manifestation of the Spirit as healing or miracles. In fact, powerful signs and wonders are more likely to happen in an atmosphere that is bathed in Holy Ghost love.”

One

friend of mine says it this way: “Some of the meanest people I know speak in tongues.”

That’s

tragic, because the majority of Pentecostals in the world today are not mean, legalistic or stuck in a time warp. Most are from the developing world, a majority are young and many will be leading the global church in the next decade. Part of their job will be to redefine the word *Pentecostal* for a new generation.

So

how do we move beyond the stereotypes and reclaim the heart of Pentecost? It would help to remember that the leaders of the New Testament church never separated spiritual gifts from spiritual fruit, and they never placed the manifestations of the Spirit above the priority of Christian love. They believed:

... Character is just as important as anointing. In our performance-driven culture, we are pressured to get results. We don't believe the Holy Spirit shows up in a meeting unless someone falls on the floor or claims a healing. We want action—and if we don't get any, we will make stuff up! Paul the apostle, on the other hand, preached that the Holy Spirit not only manifests Himself through the nine “power gifts” (listed in 1 Cor. 12:8-10) but also through His fruit (in Gal. 5:22-23). It's not just about what the Spirit *does*; it is about who He *is*. We invite problems when we showcase the spectacular and ignore the essential.

... Truth is more vital than tongues. The gift of speaking in tongues has been a priceless blessing in my own life. But the apostle Paul, who prayed in tongues more than anyone in Corinth, said he'd rather hear a five-word sermon in a language he could understand than hear someone else babble in tongues for hours (see 1 Cor. 14:18-19). Paul knew that spiritual gifts can be abused and misused. And he admitted that someone who speaks in tongues but doesn't show the love of God is like a “noisy gong” (13:1). That is a nice way to say “ANNOYING!”

While we should still pray for people to speak in tongues, perhaps we should spend twice as much time discipling them in how to represent Christ in their daily

conversation. (Note: That would include teaching Christians to stop mocking other religions, telling racist jokes or using hate speech directed at the gay community.)

... Love is more crucial than charismatic manifestations. Many of us will

preach from Acts 2 this Pentecost Sunday, and we will emphasize the wind and fire that came from heaven on that powerful day. But let's remember that the Spirit manifested himself in another way in the same chapter. The first Christians were united by a bond of love. The Spirit brought about a holy connection—something called *koinonia* ("fellowship") in Acts 2:42—and this holy love held them together.

When

the early disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit a second time (during a prayer meeting that ended with an earthquake!), this love was immediately manifested again. Immediately after the Spirit's infilling, the Bible says: "And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them" (Acts 4:32, NASB).

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William Seymour, the father of modern Pentecostalism and founder of the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles, said it this way:

“Pentecostal power, when you sum it all up, is just more of God’s love. If it does not bring more love, it is simply a counterfeit.”

Could
this be the reason we don’t see as many supernatural manifestations today? When
we are smug, hypocritical, bitter, harsh, judgmental and hateful, we totally
short-circuit God’s power. This Pentecost, I pray we will embrace not just the
sound and the fury of God’s power but also the genuine love that flows from His
heart.

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