

PENTECOSTALISM

Any attempt to define the meaning of what it means to be Pentecostal may possibly lead to definitions that stray from scripture. In a day where emotions and strange experiences govern the world of 'charismata,' there yet remains an authentic move of the Spirit upon the hearts of men and women that justify the term "Pentecostal."

Of course, if you were to watch Christian television for a short time you would understand why I believe it to be a miracle that a couch potato doesn't lose his/her mind. Images and stories of gold dust, green prosperity cloths, supposed feathers from heaven, bless me packets that sell everything from salvations to divine healings for a Psalm \$91.00 seed offering—even, people living ungodly lives behind the scenes and all the while exhibiting feats of showmanship before the masses. These are examples of everything that is wrong in the body of Christ with respect to 'charismata' and its experiments.

But, the word itself is derived from the Acts of the Apostles- chapter 2: 1-4. In this narrative, approximately 120 believers were gathered together and the Holy Spirit descended in such a way that supernaturally, they began to speak with utterances given by the Holy Ghost. Later, in the subsequent chapters which are spread out through the early years of the formative days of the apostolic Church, this same occurrence manifested itself in different locations.

We see it evidenced in Acts chapter 8: 14-17. An evangelist named Philip went down to the city, preached Christ, baptized the converts and saw revival. Then a report came to the apostles who were residing in Jerusalem that the Samaritans had received the Word of the Lord so they sent Peter & John to the city to pray that they would receive the Spirit as they had on the Day of Pentecost. As a historical feast, Pentecost was a Jewish holiday celebrating the first-fruits of the harvest. So as Christians today, we take Jesus' words from Acts 1:8 "Ye shall receive power after the Holy Ghost is come upon you.." and infer that the Holy Ghost is given for our assistance in the harvest of souls. Some claim that the early church received the Holy Ghost for the believers of all ages but this can't be logically deduced from scripture because they were baptized in water also, but they were not baptized in water for all generations to come. Even water baptism by immersion is available now and to be encouraged in each generation of believers.

By chapter ten of the Acts of the Apostles, the Church was thriving and multitudes were being saved. There were also those who were diligent in their devotion to charity but yet remained in an unconverted state. This description certainly applied to Cornelius. He gave money to the poor but his soul still thirsted for living water. So God sent the apostle Peter to Cornelius' house to preach the Gospel to him and in the middle of Peter's sermon {Acts 10: 34-48} the Holy Spirit fell upon them who heard and received the Word of God and the Pentecostal blessing became a reality for those of Cornelius' household also.

Even some of his friends got in on the blessing {10:24}. In Acts 19: 1-7 we find a story of Paul in Ephesus and while there he sought for the believers and upon finding them he inquired as to whether or not they had received the fullness of the Pentecostal blessing, to be exact Paul asked "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" Their reply informed him of their ignorance of the person of the Holy Ghost and after prayer and the laying on of hands they were filled and spoke in tongues too.

The biblical pattern is quite simple. After a sinner accepts the Lord, making the cross the place of his/her death, and becomes a born-again Christian, they should then seek the fullness of the blessing of Pentecost. The early believers were so emphatic and sincere about this issue that they sought to immediately introduce this event to the new believer.



WHAT IS THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY GHOST FOR?

1. That you might receive power to witness the Gospel to people. {Lk 24:49}
2. That you might receive divine aid for greater understanding as you study-research the scriptures. {Jn 14:26}
3. That you might receive power to do the miraculous. The Lord Jesus will accompany you as you announce the good news of Christ in your community, state, nation and around the world. {Mk 16:20}
4. The Holy Ghost's main preoccupation is to make you holy; after all, his character is one of holiness. {Rom 1:4}
5. That he may bring conviction in such a way as to turn you from the wrong toward the right things in the kingdom. {Jn 16:8-11}
6. The Holy Spirit will take you into deeper experiences in Christ. {1 Cor 12:7}

7. That you might be built up as you 'pray in the Holy Ghost.' (Jude 20)

All over the world I have observed the ministry of Jesus in Christians as they have earnestly sought God for answers to life's problems. With so much persecution of Christians taking place in the earth why would we be surprised by the help of God in facilitating the supernatural on behalf of His children; personal testimony is powerful because no one knows better than you what great things the Lord hath wrought in your own life. In travels over the globe I have, literally, seen the Lord heal the sick, saw the afflicted delivered from the oppression of the devil, folks saved by the bunches and watched as scores of seekers received the baptism of the Holy Ghost in old fashioned altar services.

This second-definite work of grace is definitely intended to lead the believer into the greater works area of Christ's life. The vast amount of good being done around the world is being done in Jesus name by Spirit-filled believers. And I might add, Spirit filled in the same sense as the first Christians mentioned in the book of acts. With so many strange ideas bandied about concerning what it means to be 'full of the Holy Ghost' it is always good to turn the pages of scripture for solutions rather than simply relying on faulty inferences individually perceived from a text of scripture. I truly believe that Jesus desires to do in and thru you what He began in the first century believers.



EVANGELICAL-REFORMED-PENTECOSTAL- WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

From a doctrinal point of view the differences are many. Even from an administrative vantage point, the manner in which these churches are structured differs greatly. But on the whole, a true blue reformed person often does not want to be considered a part of today's evangelical camp. They normally view the evangelical as inconsistent in their understanding of the plan of salvation. Reformed persons stress the sovereignty of God in such a way that they see Him as having planned beforehand who would be saved and who would be damned. Christ's atoning death is viewed as pertaining only to the saints whose salvation he procured from the foundation of the world, and not on behalf of the whole world (including sinners).

Their belief in the atonement affects their witness. No altar calls are given for the lost since God will save whom he wills to save anyway. So any effort on our part to compel men and women to come to Jesus is out of line with their view of biblical evangelism. Strongly tied to John Calvin, the leading reformation character alongside Martin Luther, reformed minded people teach cessationism: the idea that miracles ceased with the death of the last apostle and the close of the biblical canon of scripture.

An evangelical person believes that Jesus died for all and emphasizes this aspect of the Gospel accordingly. Although they strongly affirm cessationism as a true and genuine tenet of Christianity they are slightly more lenient in their approaches to describing these charismatic emphases. Moreover, they do not openly practice nor believe in speaking with other tongues, and are heavy on the once saved always saved message. Evangelical congregations on a whole are led by men who believe that God answers prayers but miracles have ceased; go figure! Admittedly, evangelical persons do stress salvation, give altar calls constantly, and lead millions to Christ each year through there tenacious beliefs in the sinners need for a Savior and His salvation.

Pentecostals have little or no feeling or sympathy with Calvinism at all; seeing it often as an aberration of the true teachings of the early church. Since Pentecostals believe in the supernatural presence of God in each successive generation they make much ado about constantly instructing their congregations in the doctrines which attest to God's power to deliver in this life.

There is no ceasing of Jesus power in the earth. Pentecostals see the writings of the early church fathers as non-canonical, but useful for purposes of historically supporting their contention that the Pentecostal blessing did not cease with the death of the last apostle. Just a short search through the sources and one can find evident testimonies of healings, salvations of Jew & gentile alike, even tongues during the period immediately after the death of the Apostle John right on up unto our own day. But research must be done beyond the confines of a churches' bordered doctrinal statement. Amazingly, many still oppose the Pentecostal blessing if for no other reason than a matter of pride. They can't bring themselves (or humble themselves) to believe that a doctrine (like cessationism) that they have fiercely embraced for so long could actually be wrong and out of sync with the Holy Scriptures.

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IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PENTECOSTALS AND CHARISMATICS? YES!

I can safely say that I have met few Pentecostals who enjoy be lumped in with the charismatic crowd of people. Mainly, because of doctrinal issues; charismatics tend to rally around experiences with little or no regard for 'sound teaching' at all. Here are a few basic distinctions:

1. Pentecostals preach the entirety of scripture from cover to cover both old and new covenants and charismatics normally emphasize the New Testament epistles. Avoiding especially those stories in the Old Testament where God judged people.
2. Pentecostals pray, meaning that they petition the Lord by asking for help. A charismatic will decree or quote scriptures and often not mention any need for God's aid and assistance in the matter. They merely speak in Jesus name and give commands.
3. Pentecostals believe in divine healing but leave the matter to God after prayer. Charismatics will tell you that your lack of faith is why you are sick; somehow you left the door open.
4. Pentecostals preach tithes and offerings and leave it there. Charismatics (just watch TV) trade salvations, healings, and emotional recoveries for monetary gifts.
5. Old time Pentecostals stick with the tried and true 'traditional texts of scripture' and charismatics use every known version of scriptures around, thus, ensuring multiple doctrinal errors.
6. Pentecostals preach 'separation' from this world. So that once one is filled with the Holy Ghost he or she should join in with saints of like precious faith and try to live a life of sanctification. Charismatics will encourage the newly converted artist to remain in his/her secular genre to be a supposed light to the lost. In this way, one might talk in tongues and at the same time remain a Honky-Tonk singer or an actor participating in and/or attending ungodly activities.
7. Pentecostals tend to sing the tried and true hymns of old that were written by the stalwart and faithful during trial and tests. Charismatics, on the other hand, do prophetic praise, making up songs as the service moves along, and often sing songs that after 5 or 6 years they dismiss as dated and out of style.

8. In the order of service, Pentecostals are more structured with the Holy Ghost having liberty but yet seeking to restrain those aspects of the flesh that take away from the service. Charismatics may not have an order other than to show up and 'see what the Lord does' in the meeting. I have been to a lot of these, and each sermon has sounded like the minister was unprepared and the Lord Himself was incognito.
9. Pentecostals usually preach Christ as the central theme and message in the organized Sunday meetings. Charismatics may spend exorbitant amounts of time on peripheral matters ie. How to prosper, how to activate the gifts, how to become a coach to your family.
10. Pentecostals strongly preach the Cross and self denial as themes of great virtue in scripture. Charismatics see the cross as a place of defeat, but, a gateway to more blessings and emphasize not the dying out to self, but the riches that are due you from God.

I don't like to have to write these things but they are what they are and they are indisputable. After decades in Christ and observing the chaos that attends many fellowships it is time that some accountability be restored. To continue like this is madness and insanity.

It should be noted that many of the early Pentecostal pioneers from a century ago exited the ranks of the evangelical and moved into a greater fullness of Christian life and experience. So from the days of Topeka, Azusa, the outpourings in Houston, Chicago, Tennessee and other locations outside of the United States of America there have been a good number of men and women who received the baptism of the Holy Ghost and received the left foot of fellowship from their peers. This gave rise to an intense persecution early on here in America where Pentecostals were castigated as cultic, treated with disdain, often forced to buy property outside of towns for their buildings and so on. The supposed leading citizens of the town were unhappy that their mortuary like churches were being disturbed by the preachments of men & women, full of the Holy Ghost, who recognized the leading of the Holy Ghost. Those days have passed and today you can't go to a family reunion except someone has a cousin, grandma, auntie or friend who is in the Pentecostal way. God bless America!!

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WHAT SHOULD I DO TO BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY GHOST?

I do hope that you will go on further in your relationship with the Lord and continue until you are full of Him and exuding Him from all sides. It really is a beautiful and fruitful way of living and Jesus is always looking for another vessel into which He may pour Himself. I'll never forget the evening that a man of God from Haiti laid his hands on me and prayed for me to be filled with the Holy Ghost. Immediately I began to speak with other tongues and I was so thrilled that all night long I was up and down again getting in and out of bed. That night forever is etched in my memory because Jesus himself filled my cup to overflowing. So as the song says,

"if you're looking for the promise of the blessing of the Lord in your heart and life today, claim the promise of your father, come according to His Word in the blessed old time way. He will fill your heart today to overflowing, as the Lord commandeth you bring your vessels not a few. He will fill your heart today to overflowing with the Holy Ghost and power."

If you desire to be filled with the Holy Ghost go back and re-read the scriptures mentioned above, read them well. Afterwards, ask the Lord to fill you with the Holy Spirit in the same way that He brought fullness to those of scripture. The whole key is to only believe. Then, when He comes, do as the old folks used to say, "just let go and let God have His wonderful way, let go and let God have his way..

I am thoroughly, completely, wholeheartedly and genuinely Pentecostal and I am not ashamed of the power of God for it is the power unto salvation; to the Jew first and then to the gentile { Rom 1:16} Well, somebody shout praise the Lord!!

Pastor Darrell Sutton