

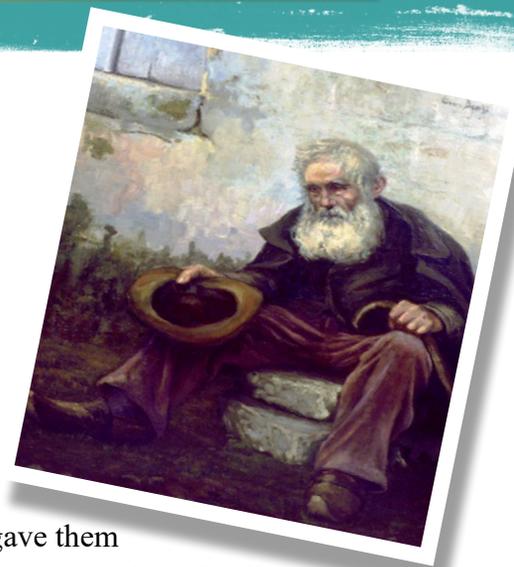
SPIRITUAL GIFTS & FRUIT

PART 2

PENTECOSTAL INTERRUPTION & FAILURE

“ Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.”

Acts 4:32 NKJV



Review of Study 18

The promise of the Father was that the believers would receive special power from the Holy Spirit and thus become witnesses of His to the end of the earth.

This occurred at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples and gave them spiritual gifts. The disciples began speaking in tongues, unknown languages to the speakers, but *known languages* to those who heard it. They were not speaking nonsense words or gibberish; they were speaking a real language as verified by men from other countries who spoke the various languages. The recipients of the gift did not study, prepare, or take a survey to find out what gift they had; the gift was obvious, instantaneous, and completely ready for immediate use. Peter boldly proclaimed that Pentecost was in the last days, that is, that Israel was entering into the last days as Joel had predicted. That meant they were just a heart-beat away from the beginning of the Tribulation. Thankfully, God's interrupted biblical prophecy by introducing a totally new, unprophesied age. The new age was the Age of Grace, in which we live. Our age interrupted biblical history and caused the 2000 year gap between Peter's "last days" and today. The purpose of the gifts was to glorify God and to enable the recipient to be a witness (immediately and without study) to those in foreign nations. What a marvelous way to prepare believers to go to all nations teaching the good news of Jesus Christ.

INTRODUCTION

In Study 18, we learned that Peter was correct in saying Pentecost was in the last days. We also know that God interrupted the biblical prophetic program sometime after Pentecost, by introducing the mystery (His secret was our Age of Grace). The thing that caused the interruption is our Age of Grace. So, we know *what* happened (that God interrupted the last days), but we do not know *why* He had to interrupt them. Why did God reveal His secret at that particular time in history? Thus,

we need to go back and examine the events of Pentecost, before the interruption, to find out why God did not let those days continue.

At Pentecost, Peter reminded the believers of the prophecies of Christ's death, and how those prophecies were now fulfilled; then he said, " **Repent therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the**

presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began' " (Acts 3:19-21). Peter told them many times of the need to repent and be converted; if they did, the desired and longed for times of refreshing and restoration would take place. The *times of refreshing* refers to the Messiah and His Kingdom, and the *restoration* refers to much the same thing, that is, the restoring of Israel to the Promised Land with the Son ruling in His Kingdom upon earth. Indeed, the Kingdom is what all the believers had wanted

for a thousand or so years, what incredible, fantastic news. The establishment of God's Kingdom on earth, and the Messiah ruling, were the ultimate dream for Israel. The end was in sight, and Pentecost was the start of the last days leading to that end. Yes, there would be the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord before the Kingdom, but they were the end events heralding the glorious Kingdom to come. Now, we need to know why, all of a sudden, all that was happening came to a screeching halt, resulting in the times of refreshing and restoration not occurring. Why did God have to introduce a new age at that time?

BIBLE TRUTH

Pentecostal Results

Studying what really happened shortly after Pentecost provides great perspective on spiritual gifts. Right after Pentecost, the disciples lived in a religious commune, that is, they had all things in common. **"Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did any one say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common ... Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone has need"** (Acts 4:32-35). The saints in Jerusalem sold all they had (houses, land, etc.) and obviously gave up their jobs. They knew they "could not take their earthly possessions with them," so they sold everything and were prepared to go wherever God sent them. The excitement of His return, the thrill of the empowerment they had just received, and the overwhelming prospect of His Kingdom on earth, were more than we can even imagine. It is a phenomenal concept to think of a group of Christians living in one accord, in total unity, no one lacking his or her needs, no selfishness, and with one heart and one soul (Acts 1:14, 21). Considering all the disagreements, needs, selfishness, and lack of unity

within the Church today, living in the Pentecostal manner is often thought to be a good model for today.

Discuss: This all sounds very exciting, should we try to recapture the glory of those days?

After the Saints in Jerusalem received the Holy Spirit and His spiritual gifts, they waited, waited longer, and then waited some more, but they did not leave and go into all the world. They were anticipating being sent-out by God; when sent, they would be the channel of blessing (those people God would use to accomplish His purpose) taking the Good News of Jesus into the rest of the world. However, something odd was happening, something was preventing them from leaving Jerusalem. There were some persecutions that caused some to go out as far as Damascus, but that was not the fulfillment of what was to occur as a result of Pentecost. The disciples did everything right, they received the spiritual gifts (to use as a sign to unbelievers in Israel), they were empowered by the Holy Spirit, and they were ready to go. However, there was a God-given order, a systematic way, in which the entire outreach was to proceed. They were told, **"...you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth"** (Acts 1:8b). They were given the order for their missionary work, that is, to start in

Jerusalem, then moving outward to Judea, then Samaria, and ultimately the uttermost parts of the earth. So, once Jerusalem was evangelized and the people converted, then they could move outward to Judea, and so on.

The problem was the unbelievers in Jerusalem would not heed the signs presented them, or repent, or trust in Jesus Christ. In order for God's plan to proceed, the leaders (primarily the religious leaders) and the majority of the people in Israel had to be converted, " **'Repent therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord'** " (Acts 3:19). Christ's return was based upon the Jewish people acceptance of Him. God's clearly revealed prophetic plan indicated that the Jewish people had to be converted, then the end would come with the establishment of the Kingdom. He would not come until the Jewish people converted. Since they did not convert, He did not come. It would have been rather silly to set up a Kingdom in which few people believed that Jesus was the King. There was no national awakening or conversion, not even in Jerusalem. So, the disciples were expected to stay in Jerusalem. They were in the last days and expected the Tribulation to begin. The biblical evidence made it clear His return would occur after the Tribulation and Day of the Lord, but why was the Tribulation not starting?

We will very briefly review Israel's sad history to answer the question above. In the Old Testament Israel rejected God the Father, "**...but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them**" (1 Sam. 8:7b)—strike one. Next, the Jewish leaders and general population rejected their Messiah and had Him crucified, " **'We will not have this man to reign over us'** " (Lk. 19:14b)—strike two. Then, shortly after Pentecost, the spiritual leaders and people stoned Stephen, then James was killed because it pleased the Jews. These were acts of open rejection and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Stephen said, "**You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you**" (Acts 7:51b). It was a rejection of the Holy Spirit because Stephen and James were full of the Spirit, "**But he, being full of the Holy Spirit....**" (Acts 7:55a). That rejection was no small matter, for

Christ said, "**Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men**" (Matt. 12:31). The rejection of the Holy Spirit was strike three, and in baseball that means, you are out! Throughout Israel's history they had rejected all three members of the Godhead, so God was compelled to take action or the end of life as we know it would have ended with relatively few people saved. The reason *why* He had to introduce a new age is because the chosen nation did not believe in Him, to continue under those circumstances would have resulted in few people ever being saved—a clear victory for Satan. God in His mercy and compassion interrupted the last days, so that He could bring in a new age, which He had always known would be needed at this time.

Your Thoughts: Is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit an unpardonable sin today? (Thought: Blasphemy against the Spirit can be forgiven today upon belief; it happens all the time. Israel's rejection was unpardonable because throughout history they had rejected all three persons of the Godhead. The blasphemy Jesus spoke about was a national rejection, not a reference to individuals.)

When Israel's spiritual leaders and general population rejected Him, He was compelled to set the chosen nation aside (Rom. 11). As He set Israel aside, He began to introduce the mystery, our age. By setting Israel aside, the premise of His soon return was abrogated (abandoned). Once the premise was abandoned, communal living was a tenuous thing and could not work long-term. Once all their capital was used up (homes and land sold, etc.), it would take a long time to recover. The inability to survive long-term has been proven numerous times by those who have tried communal living, Christian or not. In the Bible, those who obeyed Christ ended up with nothing, they were without jobs, homes, and broke; however, the most important thing, faith, could not be taken from them.

The Back to Pentecost Movement

Pentecost exhibited what occurs under perfect communal living (living together, selling all and giving the proceeds to the leaders, having all things in common, no

ownership, no one lacking, etc.). Hippies, idealists, and countless religious groups have tried to recreate perfect communal living, ever since Pentecost, only to fail. The attempts failed because Pentecostal living was premised upon repentance and Christ's soon return. Since He was expected to return soon, selling, sharing, living together in eager expectation of His coming, etc., all made sense. The Pentecostal lifestyle is what Christ wanted at that time, and it would have been a glorious success if Israel had accepted Christ.

This study spends considerable time on what happened shortly after Pentecost, so that we see *that lifestyle is not in God's plan for today*. In the process of studying what happened after Pentecost, we gain insight into what happened to the spiritual gifts. Pentecost has an incredible lure for many people today, based upon a romanticized notion of gaining church unity, establishing a community with no need, and having the jewel of all desires--Pentecostal power. Preacher after preacher, today, speaks of going back to Pentecost, ostensibly for the unity it created and for the supernatural power. Pentecost is also used as an inducement for noble causes like providing for the poor, giving to the church, and so forth. Whether we should try to return, or not, is found by rightly dividing the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15), that is, by studying the Word to see what it says for our Age. Even a secular review of history indicates communal living has poor long-term results for any group that has tried. If anyone suggests going back to Pentecost today, an honest response would be to ask that person to show the conviction of his or her heart by being the first to sell all he or she owns and donating it all to the church or commune.

Your Thoughts: Trying to recapture the Pentecostal experience is doomed to failure, since the premises underlying that experience do not exist today.

From a secular viewpoint, communal living appeals to many today (communal property, everyone treated the same, no lack of essentials, etc.). It has a certain Marxist appeal. Always remember, Pentecost was premised upon

Christ's soon return, when that did not occur the believers became destitute. Christian communal living can only work when Christ is present; no wonder it always fails.

The idea of going back to Pentecost is the furthest thing from God's plan for us today. Pentecost was based upon His soon return and national conversion, which did not occur (and has not for 2000 years). Today, we live in a new age in which we are told to provide for our own (1 Tim. 5:8), which means having jobs and homes. Paul worked, early Christians had homes (Rom. 16:5, Titus 2:5), parents are advised to "lay up" (save) for their children (2 Cor. 12:14)... To go back to Pentecost is to show disregard for God's Word and to disobey His directions for saints in the Body of Christ. Going back will not regain Pentecostal power or unity, only despair. Indeed, none of New Testament writers (after Pentecost) suggested going back, since the biblical timing would be all wrong and the results clearly are shown in Scripture.

For those who consider the Pentecostal lifestyle as the ideal for the Church today, recall what happened to the saints in Jerusalem. When the premise upon which their communal living was abrogated, and Christ did not return, the Jerusalem saints became destitute. All their money, lands, homes, jobs, and resources finally ran out. They began communal life in Acts 2 (33 AD, Ussher's chronology), by Acts 11:29 (42 AD) relief had to be sent to the saints dwelling in Judea. Relief had to be sent many times, for example in Galatians 2:10 (58 AD), 1 Corinthians 16:1 (59 AD), Romans 15:26 (60 AD), and 2 Corinthians 8:4 (60 AD). Paul reminded the Church saints to remember the poor saints in Jerusalem, who were in such straights primarily as the results of the Pentecostal lifestyle (including persecution from the unsaved). Destitution is the exact outcome for those who try to regain Pentecost for any extended period of time; it cannot work because there is no reliable income. It can only work under the conditions and direction of the Lord, and that will only occur in the Kingdom.

Discuss: Paul had to take up collections for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Discuss how this clarifies what happened as a result of rejecting the Godhead, and why communal living is not God's ideal for today.

The Pentecostal saints must have been bewildered by the events that took place. At Pentecost and shortly after, they were excited beyond belief; then they began the long wait. Little by little, their resources were used up and they became in deep financial trouble. They slowly became aware of the changes God was making, and why they were being "set aside" as a special nation. They were made acutely aware that God was doing something different when the Holy Spirit fell upon all the Gentiles who heard and believed the Word (Acts 10:44). A little later they made this observation, " **'Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.'** " (Acts 11:18b). When Paul became the new Apostle to the Gentiles (mid-Acts, say 40-45 AD), that certainly opened their eyes, even more.

The Jewish believers no doubt thought the bottom had fallen out, but it was only the beginning of sorrows. There were various persecutions and sufferings, and in 70 AD Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. Most of the Jews were either killed or had to flee to somewhere else in the world. God set Israel aside for a "season." Romans 11 discuss this setting aside, and makes the point Israel was *not set aside permanently*. Yes, Israel was temporarily set aside and has fallen; but, the nation will get back up in the future. Israel's favored position temporarily was revoked; the nation was set aside and the people were scattered. This scattering did not invalidate any of the promises or prophesies that God had already pledged, because God is faithful and will, one day, keep the covenants made with that nation. The day will come when the people in Israel will become believers, and the nation will be restored; then the nation will be what God always wanted it to be.

Israel, as a nation, is blinded to the truth of God's Word today (Rom. 11:25), but that will not last forever. Today, on an individual basis, there are many Jews who trust in

Christ and they are then members of the Body of Christ, the Church. After the Rapture of the Church, God will again take up His program with the Jewish nation (all will be unbelievers at the beginning of the Tribulation), the end days will really come this time. The Tribulation will be a *furnace of affliction* designed for Israel to purify and refine them. They will finally grasp who Jesus Christ is through the intense suffering, but only one-third will make it through the fire (Zech. 13: 9). In the end, "**all Israel will be saved...**" (Rom. 11:26). During the Day of the Lord (right after the Tribulation), Jesus Christ will come to protect and deliver Israel; then the Kingdom of Heaven will be established upon the earth with Christ reigning as the King of Kings.

The Age of Grace (Church Age)

We will now turn to the Pauline Epistles to learn more about the Age of Grace. Remember, Pentecost was in the last days of the Law Age, and God interrupted that age to introduce His secret age, the Age of Grace. Ending one age and beginning another cannot be done overnight; certainly God could do it, but we poor humans need time to comprehend such changes. For information to get from the mind of God to the heart of humans takes considerable time. For our sakes, the Lord allowed the Law Age to pass away over a period of years, while at the same time the Age of Grace developed. We could say, one age transitioned out as another transitioned in. The old Law Age sort of "phased out," while the new Age of Grace "phased in." It took something on the order of twelve (12) years to make the transition from one age to the other, that is, from Pentecost (33 AD) to the Age of Grace (40-45 AD).

Those living in the Law Age needed comfort and direction from the Apostles for that age. For God to bring in a new age, He had to rapidly raise up a new apostle(s) to provide the new truth and direction to those entering the new age. As the Age of Grace began, there was also a need for special people, people who could help the emerging and developing Church. Thus, God used gifted people to help get the Church started. The early Church did not have any written Word specifically for the Age

of Grace, so prophets, tongues, pastors, teachers, and other gifts, were needed to help believers know what was transpiring.

Interrupting the prophetic events of the Law Age, was an act of mercy for the Jewish people; otherwise, God's judgment would have come upon them. Interrupting the flow of history was also God's act of love and grace for us; we got the Gospel even though Israel failed to be witnesses to the ends of the earth. God used a "hidden" plan to get the truth to us so that we could be saved. God's secret, hidden plan (our age) was in His mind from the beginning, knowing Israel would fail (as any nation would have).

Your Thoughts: Can you see how God demonstrated His love for us by interrupting the flow of history?

Paul became the chief Apostle of our age and he had all/most of the spiritual gifts, using them extensively in his early to mid ministry. He was bitten by a viper and lived (Acts 28:3, 8), healed the sick and cast out demons (Acts 19:12, 14:10), spoke in tongues (1 Cor. 14:18), and

much more. There were many people with a great assortment of spiritual gifts in the early church; these people were needed to help get the new Church started. Their gifts were used to give the church a *jump-start*, that is, to give it an extra boost so it could get a good start.

It took years for Paul to become fully informed of all the new truth that was part of the Age of Grace (AOG). The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write it all down, so it was perfectly and completely documented in Scripture. His writings are found in Romans through Philemon. His portion of Scripture took about twelve years to write; but as he wrote, the truth for the AOG was progressively revealed in the written Word. As the Bible was being completed (that pertaining to our age), it provided all the information humans needed in the AOG. The completion of the Word would certainly seem to have an impact on the future need for gifted people.

In the next study, we will address two major issues: 1) the purpose of the spiritual gifts in the early Church, and 2) if the purpose for spiritual gifts were fulfilled, what would become of spiritual gifts?

SUMMARY

Around the time of Pentecost, the disciples sold everything they owned, lived communally, and were prepared to go as God directed. They were excited with the prospect of Christ's soon return, with the thrill of the new gifts they had just received, and the incredible prospect of His Kingdom on earth. As the saints in Jerusalem waited, it soon became obvious something was wrong. The disciples did everything right, and had the spiritual gifts preparing them to disciple the nations. However, there was a God-given order to their endeavors, and that order required the unbelievers in Jerusalem to heed the signs presented them, that is, to repent and trust in Jesus Christ. The leaders (primarily the religious leaders) and the majority of the people in Israel had to be converted before the disciples could go out, and before Christ would come back. No such conversion occurred, in fact, there was an outright

rejection of the entire Godhead. God temporarily gave up on Israel, and that left the saints in a terrible predicament. They began communal life in 33 AD, and by 42 AD relief had to be sent to the saints dwelling in Judea, and many times after that. Pentecost was in the last days of the Law Age; God interrupted that age to introduce His secret age, the Age of Grace. The idea of going back to Pentecost is totally outside of God's plan for us today. God quickly and totally unexpectedly revealed the Age of Grace when He gave up on the chosen nation. Today we are told to provide for our own; which means having jobs, homes, and not living in a commune. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write the Scripture which specifically applies to our age. We are to live and believe according to the Scripture for our age, not that which was written for the time of Pentecost.

WORD OF COUNSEL

The believer today will not receive miraculous gifts as proof he or she is a believer. That was what happened around the time of Pentecost. At Pentecost, God gifted people in amazing ways, and no one lacked basic needs. However, that is not how God works today, and do not let anyone fool you about this.

For today, the Lord tells us that we are to work to support ourselves and our families. Second Thessalonians 3:10b says, **"If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat"** (of course, this is in reference to those who were physically and mentally capable). For those who cannot provide for themselves, or who have suffered great loss, we are to have compassion on them. It was the compassion of the early Church believers that provided resources for the Pentecostal saints after they became destitute.

Any attempt to recapture the greatness of Pentecost is, sorry to say, "a fool's errand." It is not possible, and not God's will. Pentecostal living was God's plan for the believers in view of a national repentance and Christ's return in the very near future. Pentecostal living became a failure (due to human unbelief), and it will fail today.

If you want to go into the Lord's work today, you must be qualified, prepared, and have an honest passion for the work (a calling). If you lack passion for any job, God may not be guiding you in that direction. You have to study and prepare for the Lord's work, like any other job.

Do not make the mistake of thinking you will be successful in the Lord's work simply because it seems like a good thing to do.

God may give you the raw talents and abilities needed for His work, or for another occupation in life. However, you must also develop those talents to make them truly effective. Whatever occupation or profession you chose, the road may be difficult; but do not despair, God will be there for you at all times.

God interrupted the flow of human events for a reason. That reason was to introduce a new age, the Age of Grace. It is necessary for each Christian to understand what God is doing in the Age of Grace. Study the Pauline Epistles, for that is where you will find the truth for our age. In those Epistles, you will see that the terms of Salvation are not the same as in other ages. Salvation is a gift of God's grace based upon a person's faith in Christ. Personal performance, doing good works, being baptized, and obeying rules have nothing to do with Salvation. God will save anyone who has faith in Christ, no matter what sins he or she has committed, or how terrible that person may think he or she is. God delights in saving sinners. We believers welcome you into the family of faith (Body of Christ) and want you to know you are loved and appreciated.

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