



## WHY PENTECOST?

By Rev. Will Nelken

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How does God speak today?

Just as it once marked the giving of the Law in Israel's history, the Day of Pentecost later marked the descent of the Holy Spirit in the Church's history, and the inherent shift from following the letter of the Law to following the voice of the Spirit.

### **Letter of the Law**

The Law that God gave to Moses, writing it with His own finger on tablets of stone, was the first recorded speech of God to mankind. The books of history, poetry, and prophecy surrounding that Law and the people to whom God gave it make up what we know as the Holy Bible, the Word of God, written, as it was, over some 1400 years by close to 40 different writers.

We believe the Bible has been verbally inspired—its words were God-breathed into its writers, revealing who God is, what He has done, and to what end—and that it is infallible—without error in its revelation and instruction—and an authoritative rule for faith and conduct, or as Paul put it to Timothy:

*“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*

It was the Holy Spirit, the Breath of God, who authored the Scriptures in the souls of its original writers. And it is the Holy Spirit who faithfully interprets and applies the words of the Bible for our understanding and practice today. And here is where the distinction lies.

Apart from the interactivity of the Holy Spirit, the words of the Bible cannot be properly understood in their content or their intent. Because the Bible reveals and addresses things that cannot be humanly known through mere reason or observation (the substance and purpose of God and the spiritual world), its proper use is dependent on human faith and the Spirit's guidance.

The first time I read through the Bible, having no clear understanding of its overall message or how its discrete parts fit together to reveal it, I highlighted various phrases that inspired and fortified the budding faith I had and the salvation I had begun to experience. It was a little like capturing inspiring quotations from authors whose ideas I already agree with—they just say it so much better than I could.

Then, I began to recognize certain themes or topics that were of interest to me, popping up in various places throughout that library of 66 books, which we call the Holy Bible. So I highlighted them with certain colors and scribbled in the margin to mark their locations. Within a couple of years, my Bible was such a rainbow of colors and notes, that I was distracted from just listening as I read for fresh inspiration. I had to buy a new Bible, just to see clean pages again, and hear more clearly what the Spirit had to say to me *today*.

You see, I was categorizing what I read as my understanding grew, but then the categories became a fixed structure of understanding and application that limited my “aliveness” to the Holy Spirit and began to stunt my own spiritual growth. I had become captured by the “letter of the Law,” as I understood it; therefore, I was disabled for learning more.

Isn't this what happened to the Pharisees that we read so much about in the four Gospels? They were so serious about the truthfulness of the Scriptures (which we should be also), but once they thought they understood a topic, they felt like they had arrived, and their ideas became fixed like concrete. Then they shifted their focus from learning to defending what they thought they knew. And when you are defending your knowledge, you are incapable of learning anything new.

So when Jesus came—the very Son of the Living God, their much-anticipated Messiah—they did not recognize Him, because their narrow and fixed expectations had become the boundaries of their faith. Jesus didn't fit what they were looking for, and they didn't want to see anything new.

That is the “letter of the Law that kills.” Paul explained to the church in Corinth, Greece: *“You are a letter of Christ, delivered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on tablets of human hearts. God... made us... servants of a new covenant, not based on the letter but on the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”* (2 Corinthians 3:3-6)

The words on the page (though they are truth) may become our blinders to hide distractions and limit what we see, instead of the eyeglasses through which we are enabled to see the myriad marvels of God.

## Voice of the Spirit

Last week we thought together about “hearing the voice of God.” Do you remember? From Elijah’s story, it was not in the windstorm, not in the earthquake, nor in the fire of lightning that God spoke to the prophet, but in a still, small whisper of a voice.

God has, in fact, spoken in many such ways in the past, but He speaks far more often in that “whisper” today. Or, as the writer to the Hebrews expressed it: *“In the past God spoke to our ancestors at many different times and in many different ways through the prophets. In these last days He has spoken to us through His Son. God made His Son responsible for everything. His Son is the one through whom God made the universe. His Son is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact likeness of God’s being. He holds everything together through His powerful words. After He had cleansed people from their sins, He received the highest position, the one next to the Father in Heaven.”* (Hebrews 1:1-3)

After 400 years of prophetic silence between the Old and New Testaments, when there had been no “words from God” declared in the villages of Judea, Jesus came on the scene with little more than an infant’s cry—hardly a new revelation! But this revelation of God was not primarily in words, but in a Person!

And right here is the stumbling stone over which so many—perhaps even you—have tripped. When we distill the purpose of Jesus’ arrival down to the words that He spoke—however enlightened and enlightening—we miss the greatest aim of His coming.

If it was only words that we needed to hear, God could have spoken in so many different ways as He had in the past, but this revelation required so much more. No prophet could suffice. Not even an angel from heaven could convey the message that needed to be received (or accomplish the work that had to be done).

The Living God was required, in the form of a living human—Emmanuel, the incarnation of the Almighty. The Creator became one of the created. God became one of us. Singer-songwriter Matt Redman described it so clearly:

*The same blood, the same flesh, one of us*

*The same skin, the same breath, one of us*

*The same dust and dirt*

*The same trials and hurts*

*One of us*

Actually, one of us.

No fanfare. No pomp. No fireworks. An otherwise silent night in an obscure Judean village.

If you want to hear a whisper, you must become still yourself. The constant noise of our modern environment makes it more difficult to discern the voice of God from all the other voices, many times leaving us confused or uncertain about what, if anything, we have heard.

A real Man, in whom the Holy Spirit dwelt in all His fullness—that's Jesus. A Man who was with God. A Man who was God. A Man through whom the Spirit spoke clearly—more clearly than ever before.

He used the same words as the poets and prophets before Him, but spoke them in new, fresh, unveiled ways that brought God near, and brought us home to God. Jesus had not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it, and in so doing, to unveil its proper meaning and application.

Jesus' words, like His deeds, always expressed the glory of God, while maintaining the value of people as those loved by God. Like a hammer, His words of kindness shattered the fetters of prejudice and broke the bonds of isolation. When He spoke, people felt heard.

That was the Spirit of God speaking through Him. For the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all One. One and the same God. One and the same Creator. One and the same Redeemer. One and the same Savior.

When Jesus speaks, it is the Father speaking. *"The things I say, I say just as the Father has told Me."* (John 12:50) *"The word you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me."* (John 14:24)

When the Spirit speaks, it is Jesus speaking. For *"the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."* (Revelation 19:10)

*"The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."* If the words of the Bible hobble us, then we are only hearing "the letter," for the Spirit has come to set us free. Pray for clarity.

Jesus said, *"I have spoken these things while staying with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you everything, and will cause you to remember everything I said to you."* (John 14:25-26)

*"When the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into the full truth. He won't speak on His own. He will speak what He hears and will tell you about things to come. He will give Me glory, because He will tell you what I say. Everything the Father says is also what I say. That is why I said, 'He will take what I say and tell it to you.'"* (John 16:13-15)

"When the Spirit of Truth comes," points directly to the Day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2: *"On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. <sup>2</sup> Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on*

*each of them. <sup>4</sup> And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.” (Acts 2:1-4)*

God was speaking. Jesus was speaking. The Spirit was speaking. And Christ’s followers began to speak, *“as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.”*

Speaking in other tongues as the first believers did on Pentecost, brings the voice of the Holy Spirit into our sphere of life—yours and mine. *“The Spirit prays along with our groanings that cannot be expressed in words.” (Romans 8:26)*

While my speaking in languages of the Spirit will not directly benefit anyone else who hears me, since they cannot understand what I have said—*“For the one speaking in a tongue does not speak to people but to God, for no one understands; he is speaking mysteries by the Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 14:2)*—yet, when I have prayed in the Spirit, my own heart and mind will be illuminated by His voice (*“The one who speaks in an unknown language builds himself up.”*), and the resulting enlightenment will communicate to others.

If you are not filled with the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit, then you are living on your own, even if it is in a Christian way. The baptism with the Holy Spirit is not an option for the more demonstrative believers; it is a necessary gift of the Father for every earnest believer. Don’t make excuses for why you don’t speak with other tongues! Pray until you receive the baptism.

The first disciples were instructed to wait in prayer until they were “endued with power,” and they did. It was certainly necessary for ALL of that early group, because Jesus had not yet been glorified in His ascension, and the Holy Spirit had not yet been given. Those two prerequisites are now behind us all.

However, there is also a human side to tarrying. Since the baptism with the Spirit is about a full and conscious surrender to the Lordship of Jesus, removing the blockages of pride and unbelief—some are able to do that more quickly than others (for a variety of reasons, it seems).

I recently read a scholarly report about the “tarrying” that Jesus spoke about. Research of 80 published testimonies from the early 1900s by some of the leaders of our movement, as well as others from various parts of the nation, and other nations of the world, revealed that about 75% of them who persistently pursued the Lord for His gift day after day, received the baptism with the Spirit in about a week, and some received on the first day they prayed. Yet, about 25% testified that they sought the blessing for weeks or months before receiving it, fighting off disappointment and discouragement along the way.

The only difference these days (at least in the West), seems to be that people who have been culturally schooled to expect instant gratification in many areas of life, lack the drive or skill of

persistent prayer, and they simply settle for less than what God has promised. After all, many non-Pentecostals are assured of their salvation and lead faithful lives.

But what sort of attitude is that, that only reaches for the lowest-hanging fruit and leaves the rest? Where is the Champion Spirit that won't be put off? (*"Jesus told them a parable to show them they should always pray and not lose heart."*) Where is the soul who is willing to press in and press ahead, and do all that they can possibly do to meet with God?

As Peter declared on that glorious day, *"This promise belongs to you and to your children and to everyone who is far away. It belongs to everyone who worships the Lord our God."* (Acts 2:39)

### **Believe the promise. Receive the promise.**

And just here is a crucial element of this wondrous stream of communication and revelation. The Holy Spirit—the same Spirit who hovered above the waters at creation, the same Spirit who hovered over Mary at conception, the same Spirit who alighted on Jesus at His baptism, the same Spirit who comforted Him through the cross and raised Him from the dead, the same Spirit who took Jesus back to the Father's throne and descended from there to the waiting, longing Church—is now in us, receiving all that belongs to and comes from Jesus and giving it to us.

The Church—you and I, along with all who believe—have become the Spirit's voicebox today, to declare Jesus' praise, and announce His Kingdom, to teach His words, and invite others to know Him for themselves.

*"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart, (that is, the word of faith which we announce").* (Romans 10:8)

Such an amazing privilege has been extended to us, to announce the coming Kingdom, and to demonstrate its life and love. Who is sufficient for such things? Is anyone capable within themselves? Is there anything else that should so drive us to our knees with a cry for help?

How could we be so shortsighted as to imagine that this is about us having more stuff and enjoying "the good life" for ourselves?

You have been created, formed, transformed, and called. Answer the call! You'll be frustrated by anything less... unless you choose instead to close your heart and shut your eyes.

Answer the call. Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call on Him while He is near.

Ask the Lord Jesus to baptize you with the Holy Spirit, until you speak to God in other tongues—a language you've never heard or learned.

For then, *“you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be [Jesus'] witnesses, telling people about [Him] everywhere.”* (Acts 1:8)

And that's what it's all about.