

## **“THAT OLD TIME RELIGION”**

# ***“The Spirit-Filled Church”***

## **Scripture Reading – Acts, 2:1-12**

*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*

*Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.*

*Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”*

*Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”*

***‘With many other words Peter warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation”. Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.’***

**Acts, 2:40-41, NIV**

**This series, based on THE BOOK OF ACTS, is entitled ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’.**

The reason I want to call this series ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’ is because we need to look back in order that we might really look forward. The ‘old time religion’ needs to become the ‘new time religion’, because it is the ‘all time religion’. If we get back to the basics of life in the Early Christian Church, we will understand what the Holy Spirit can do in our hearts and lives today.

**THE BOOK OF ACTS is the story of success; the story of a church triumphant.**

It is the story of a small group of uncultured and generally unlearned people with meagre resources – very little money, no prestige, and no church buildings. This small group of people went out to tell the story of a publicly executed Jew. They went out against three obstacles – the imperial might of the Romans, the intellectual sophistication of the Greeks, and the religious bigotry of the Jews. They turned the world inside out and upside down for Jesus Christ.

*The Acts of the Apostles is the story of a church on fire with evangelism and growth...*

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## **“THE SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH”**

**We have already noted something about ‘THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH’.**

Whilst the Christian denomination was founded after the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906, we must look back 2,000 years to gain understanding of the true Church of Pentecost. In our last sermon, we noted that ‘THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH’ was (i) A PEOPLE OF PROMISE – on whom Jesus promised the infilling of the Holy Spirit; (ii) A PEOPLE OF PURPOSE – who asked about prophecy, but Jesus replied about preaching; (iii) A PEOPLE OF PRAYER – for they all joined together constantly in prayer; and, (iv) A PEOPLE OF POWER – as the Holy Spirit filled all of them.

**How would you define a Spirit-filled Church?**

Many would define it as a church complete with a worship band which leads the congregation in singing mostly modern contemporary songs and modern arrangements of classic hymns. A definition would probably include something about the preacher, and the type of services that are held in church. Undoubtedly healing and miracle services would be a must. Some would define a Spirit-filled Church as one that exhibited the gifts of the Holy Spirit in its worship, and some would claim that the gift of tongues would be essentially evident.

*Unfortunately, I could not find a good description on the internet, but I did discover that ‘THE SPIRIT FILLED CHURCH’ in Shelbyville, Tennessee is changing its name. There is an email link to provide suggestions, however funny or sarcastic. I wonder why they are changing their name.*

**Are they no longer a Spirit-filled Church?**

*‘We are not going to move this world by criticism of it nor conformity to it, but by the combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God.’*

**Vance Havner**

The Early Christian Church had none of the things that we think are so essential for success today – buildings, money, political influence, social status – and yet the Church won multitudes to Christ and saw many churches established throughout the Roman world. Why? Because the Church had the power of the Holy Spirit energising its ministry. They were a people who were ‘IGNITED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD’.

That same Holy Spirit power is available to us today to make us more effective witnesses for Christ. The better we understand his working at Pentecost, the better we will be able to relate to him and experience his power. The ministry of the Spirit is to glorify Christ in the life and witness of the believer (see **John, 16:14**). This chapter helps us understand the Holy Spirit by recording four hallmarks of the Spirit-Filled Church.

***The Early Christian Church gives us four hallmarks of the Spirit-Filled Church...***

## **1. SUPERNATURAL POWER**

***‘When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.’***

**Acts, 2:1, NIV**

Pentecost was a vivid realisation of the promises of Jesus:

*“I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”*

**Luke, 24:49, NIV**

*“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you...”*

**Acts, 1:8a, NIV**

*There were three startling signs that accompanied the coming of the Spirit: the sound of a rushing wind, tongues of fire, and the believers praising God in various languages...*

### THE POWER WAS VISUALISED

*‘Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.’*

**Acts, 2:2-3, NIV**

The disciples were alerted to the supernatural because of a violent wind.

Inside the house where they were meeting, there seemed to be a tornado blowing around. The word ‘SPIRIT’ is the same as ‘WIND’ in both the Hebrew and the Greek. The people did not feel the ‘WIND’; they heard the sound of ‘A VIOLENT WIND’.

(Note: it is possible that the believers were in the Temple when this occurred, for the word ‘HOUSE’ can also refer to the temple!)

*‘Jesus said to Nicodemus, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit”.’*

**John, 3:8, NIV**

After the sound of the wind, there came the sight of the fire.

Tongues of fire separated and came to rest on each of the disciples – 120 human candles burning brightly together. The tongues of fire symbolised the powerful witness of the church to the people. Of course, our tongues can be set on fire either by heaven or by hell (see **James, 3:5-6**). When you combine wind and fire together the result is a blaze, or even a raging inferno. The wind and fire is a powerful and unstoppable combination.

**Fire cleanses and purges; it illumines and energises; it also warms.**

After attending a church service in 1791, Robert Burns wrote in a church hymnal:

*As cold a wind as ever blew. As cold a church, and in it few.  
As cold a minister has ever spak. You’d better be hot if I come back.*

### THE POWER WAS VOCALISED

*‘All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a*

*crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.’*

**Acts, 2:4-6, NIV**

The believers were praising God, not preaching the Gospel, in known languages.

Luke named fifteen different geographical locations and clearly stated that the citizens of those places heard Peter and the others declare God’s wonderful works in languages they could understand. The Greek word translated ‘LANGUAGES’ in **Acts, 2:6** and ‘TONGUES’ in **Acts, 2:4** is ‘DIALEKTOS’ and refers to a language or dialect of some country or district.

One reason for this gift is because the Gospel is for the whole world.

God wants to speak to every person in his or her own language and give the saving message of salvation in Jesus Christ. The emphasis in the Book of Acts is on worldwide evangelisation, ‘TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH’ (see **Acts, 1:8**). ‘THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST IS THE SPIRIT OF MISSIONS AND THE NEARER WE GET TO HIM, THE MORE INTENSELY MISSIONARY WE MUST BECOME’ (Henry Martyn).

Note: the gift of tongues is not a sign at all for fellow Christians.

*‘In the Law it is written: “Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people [the Jews], but even then they will not listen to me”, says the Lord. Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers.’*

**1 Corinthians, 14:21-22, NIV**

### THE POWER WAS VITALISED

*‘Jesus said, “For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit”.’*

**Acts, 1:5, NIV**

The Greek word ‘BAPTIZO’ has two meanings, one literal and the other figurative.

The word literally means ‘TO SUBMERGE’, but the figurative meaning is ‘TO BE IDENTIFIED WITH’. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is that act of God by which he identified believers with the exalted head of the church, Jesus Christ, and formed the spiritual body of Christ on earth.

Historically, this took place at Pentecost. Today, it takes place whenever a sinner trusts Jesus and is born again. Therefore, you are baptised in the Spirit when you are saved.

*‘All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.’*

**Acts, 2:4a, NIV**

The infilling of the Holy Spirit has to do with power for witness and service.

We are not exhorted to be baptised by the Holy Spirit, for this is something God does once and for all when we trust in his Son. However, we are commanded to ‘BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT’ (see **Ephesians, 5:18**), for we need his power constantly if we are to serve God effectively.

At Pentecost, the Christians were filled with the Holy Spirit and also experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit; but after that, they experienced many fillings (see **Acts, 4:8, 31; Acts, 9:17; Acts, 13:9**) but no more baptisms.

**One hallmark of the spirit-filled church is that there is a display of supernatural power.**

## 2. SCRIPTURAL PREACHING

*‘Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel...”’*

**Acts, 2:14-16, NIV**

**Peter preached a Christ-centred sermon.**

The same Peter that once quaked at the challenge of a young girl as he betrayed Jesus three times has been transformed by the infilling of the Holy Spirit so that he can stand up before great numbers of people and preach about Jesus. Peter’s sermon spoke about (i) THE MANNER OF JESUS’ LIFE; (ii) THE MEANING OF JESUS’ DEATH; (iii) THE MIRACLE OF JESUS’ RESURRECTION ; and, (iv) THE MAGNITUDE OF JESUS’ REIGN .

Peter took his scripture text from the prophecy of Joel (see Joel, 2:28-32).

*‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’*

**Acts, 2:17-21, NIV**

**Not everything mentioned in Joel’s prophecy was happening that particular morning.**

The ‘LAST DAYS’ include all the days between Christ’s first and second comings and is another way of saying ‘FROM NOW ON’. ‘THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD’ denotes the whole Christian age. Even Moses yearned for the Lord to put his Spirit upon everyone (see **Numbers, 11:29**). At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was released throughout the entire world – to men, women, slaves, free, Jews, Gentiles. Now everyone can receive the Holy Spirit – a revolutionary thought for first-century Jews!

**One of the hallmarks of the spirit-filled church is that there is preaching and teaching.**

If ever this church stops wanting to hear scriptural preaching, then it will be my cue to leave – and if you do not wish to hear scriptural preaching, then it will signal the end of this corps!

## 3. SAVED PEOPLE

*‘When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call”.’*

**Acts, 2:37-39, NIV**

**The Holy Spirit took Peter’s message and used it to convict the hearts of the listeners.**

After all, if they were guilty of crucifying their Messiah, what might God do to them? Note that they addressed their question to the other Apostles as well as to Peter, for all twelve were involved in the witness that day, and Peter was only first among equals.

Peter told them how to be saved: they had to repent of their sins and believe on Jesus Christ. They would give proof of the sincerity of their repentance and faith by being baptised in the name of Jesus Christ, thus identifying themselves publicly with their Messiah and Saviour. Only by repenting and believing on Christ could they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

*By the end of the day, three thousand people repented, believed, and were saved...*



### PEOPLE CONVICTED BY THE LORD

**‘WHEN THE PEOPLE HEARD THIS, THEY WERE CUT TO THE HEART’**

We should not expect people to be brow-beaten into heaven. Nor can they be won for the Kingdom by theological argument. True witnessing for Jesus Christ is not found in presenting him through a marketing presentation or a sales pitch.

People will only be ‘CUT TO THE HEART’ when they see something in you that catches their attention and claims their interest, then, when the truth about Jesus is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit will convict of sin and convince them of the claims of Christ. Then they will ask, “BROTHERS, WHAT SHALL WE DO?”.



### PEOPLE CONVERTED TO THE LORD

**‘PETER REPLIED, “REPENT”’**

**The word ‘REPENT’ means ‘A CHANGE OF MIND, A CHANGE OF DIRECTION’.**

No one has ever been converted who has not repented. To be saved requires a complete turn around in life. As we are travelling one way, the claims of Christ turn us around 180 degrees. This is not just a change of heart; it involves a change of mind. To repent literally means ‘TO THINK DIFFERENTLY’. Peter may well have said, “BELIEVE” because to repent and believe are two faces of the same coin.



### PEOPLE CONFESSING THE LORD

**“BE BAPTISED IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF YOUR SINS”**

Baptism was to be an outward expression of an inward experience.

This translation of **Acts, 2:38** may suggest that people must be baptised in order to be saved, but this is not what the Bible teaches. The Greek word 'EIS', which is translated 'FOR', can mean 'ON ACCOUNT OF' or 'ON THE BASIS OF'. This verse should not be used to teach salvation by baptism. If baptism is essential for salvation, it seems strange that Peter says nothing about it in any of his other Acts sermons.

## **PEOPLE CONTROLLED BY THE LORD**

**'YOU WILL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'**

**The special spiritual birthday gift God wants to give you is the Holy Spirit himself.**

This gift is given to us so that the Almighty can lead us and guide us, and we can confidently give ourselves over to the complete control of the Lord. One of the great products of salvation is that it gets us out of earth and in to heaven, but it also gets heaven into us. Salvation is more than believing and achieving something, it is receiving someone. The Holy Spirit is that someone. He is the promised gift.

## **PEOPLE CONTINUING WITH THE LORD**

**'THEY CONTINUED STEADFASTLY IN THE APOSTLES' DOCTRINE AND FELLOWSHIP'**

**Scripture does not encourage us to look back at our past decisions.**

Jesus did not call us to make decisions but to make disciples. We do not look back at our past when we knelt at the feet of Jesus as our assurance of salvation. Instead, we look at ourselves today: "Am I now trusting in Jesus for my salvation?" It is not a case of: 'ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED', instead it is a case of: 'I BELIEVE AND TRUST IN JESUS NOW, THEREFORE I KNOW I AM SAVED!'.

*One hallmark of the spirit-filled church is people responding to scriptural preaching.*

## **4. SPIRITUAL PROGRAMME**

*'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people.'*

**Acts, 2:42-47a, NIV**

In Acts, 2:40-47, we read of five purposes God desires for his Church:

<u><b>EVANGELISM</b></u>	(Acts, 2:40-41)	<u><b>MINISTRY</b></u>	(Acts, 2:45)
<u><b>DISCIPLESHIP</b></u>	(Acts, 2:42)	<u><b>WORSHIP</b></u>	(Acts, 2:42, 46-47)
<u><b>FELLOWSHIP</b></u>	(Acts, 2:42, 44, 46)		

**We have considered these verses at length in our series 'THE CHURCH ON PURPOSE'.**

The Church exists to reach people for Jesus and to teach those who respond how to become like Jesus and to live like Jesus. The Church exists to care for people's needs in the name of Jesus through the acts of its members in faithful ministry and service. Whilst this is happening, the Church must worship God in the splendour of his holiness, in spirit and in truth. All this activity must be underpinned by the foundation of faithful prayer by members of the Church...

## **In a Spirit-filled Church there is indoctrination.**

*The Church members 'DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES' TEACHING'.*

They were very interested in bible study. They wanted to know and understand how the risen Lord Jesus fitted in with their Jewish religion. Bible study is a key ingredient in every Spirit-filled Church. We need to study God's Word together in our worship services, in small groups, and by ourselves at home.

## **In a Spirit-filled Church there is edification.**

*The Church members 'DEVOTED THEMSELVES... TO THE FELLOWSHIP'.*

True Christian fellowship is 'KOINONIA' – literally meaning 'COMMUNION' or 'SHARING'. The reality is that you need me, and I need you. We need one another as we seek to build one another up in the faith. No one can grow best in isolation. There should be no amputated limbs from the body of Christ.

## **In a Spirit-filled Church there is adoration.**

*The Church members 'DEVOTED THEMSELVES... TO THE BREAKING OF BREAD AND TO PRAYER'.*

Whilst it is true that all of life should be placed before the Lord as a living sacrifice, as an act of worship, there is something unique in joining with fellow Christians to worship the Lord. The singing, the prayers, the testimony, the offering, the scripture, every element of worship should uplift the name of Jesus and allow us to adore him for who he is.

## **In a Spirit-filled Church there is participation.**

*The Church members sold their possessions to give to the needy.*

This was a voluntary and temporary act. The great numbers of converts to Christianity were in no hurry to go back to the own homes and lands. There was a real need to be met. People were in need of food and shelter, and those that had gave to those that had not, and God blessed the giver and the receiver.

## **In a Spirit-filled Church there is propagation.**

*The result? 'THE LORD ADDED TO THEIR NUMBER DAILY THOSE WHO WERE BEING SAVED'*

If you do not like big churches, this was not the church for you! It started with 120 disciples (**Acts, 1:15**). At the Day of Pentecost 3,000 people were added (**Acts, 2:41**). Every day people were being saved (**Acts, 2:47**), and eventually the number of men grew to 5,000 (**Acts, 4:4**). Soon people were no longer added: there was multiplied growth (**Acts, 6:1**).

*One hallmark of the spirit-filled church is that it is a growing church!*