Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Undervaluing Pentecost (R.C. Sproul)
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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Strange Fire Conference

Well hello, John, and guests of this conference on the work of the Holy Spirit. I'm so sorry that I'm not able to be with you today in person, but at the same time I'm delighted to be able to be with you through this particular medium. And I know there are lots of issues that we are going to be addressing with respect to our understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit among us. But I want to look specifically today at the redemptive historical significance of Pentecost.

I think most of us are aware that the Pentecostal Movement of the twentieth century began at the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles and for several decades the Pentecostal Movement was for the most part a movement that was taking place outside of the main-line churches. But then about in the middle of the twentieth century, the Pentecostal Movement spread and spread rapidly in and through the so-called mainline denominations. We remember the outbreak of the Charismatic Movement at Notre Dame University and also at Duquesne University showing its influence within the Roman Catholic communion and it moved into the Presbyterian circles, Lutheran circles, Anglican circles, Methodist circles, even Baptist circles where it met with this extraordinary revival of interest in the gifts and the power of God the Holy Spirit.

Now initially when the Pentecostal Movement came into these various denominations, there were several attempts to assimilate its theology and to the creedal positions of the various denominations. So the Presbyterians developed their Charismatic Theology, the Lutherans their Charismatic theology, and so on. But as the Movement increased and developed, there became a similar development of theology and theological reflection among neo-Pentecostals. And so what emerged what has been called a neo-Pentecostal theology.

Now with respect to that theology, it was not, or is it now, monolithic. Not everybody in the Charismatic Movement shares exactly the same theological understanding of it. Yet at the same time, there are some basic ingredients that have become pretty much central to neo-Pentecostal theology. And I'm not going to deal with all of them today. But one of the most significant aspects of the emerging Charismatic Theology was the idea that it is normal or even normative for people to have what is understood as the baptism of the Holy Spirit after their conversion. It is admitted that some people can have conversion or regeneration simultaneously with the so-called second blessing, or the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But in the main, the usual, normal process is understood to have some

kind of time differential between conversion or regeneration and the receiving of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Now it's that particular point that I want to address today because I think the fundamental weakness of neo-Pentecostal, or Charismatic theology is that in my opinion its view of Pentecost is too low and that it's understanding of the significance of Pentecost in redemptive history differs from the Apostles understanding of that experience.

Now one thing I hope we all agree on is that the baptism of the Holy Spirit may indeed be distinguished from the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. It may also be distinguished from the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit, and also distinguished from that process of sanctification by which synergistically we work together with the Spirit of God in our progress of being conformed to the image of Christ. And so the significance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit has to do principally with the Holy Spirit's empowering Christians for ministry. Before we go back to the Old Testament roots of it, I want to remind you of the meeting that Jesus had with His disciples shortly before His death and at one point He announced to them that He was going away and where He was going they would not be able to go, at least not immediately. And when Jesus gave that announcement to His people, they were forlorn indeed, they were devastated. Their hearts were broken, they couldn't stand the thought of living in the absence of Jesus. And to allay their fears and to give some consolation to them, our Lord said to them that it was expedient or necessary for them that He depart because unless He departed, He would not be able to give to them the Holy Spirit in the sense in which He was talking.

And then again, before His departure, from this planet, before His ascension, He told His disciples that they should tarry in Jerusalem inasmuch as they would receive power and after they would receive power they were to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the uttermost part s of the earth. We also know that in the Upper Room, Jesus gave His longest discourse on the Holy Spirit when He said that when He would leave, He would not leave us comfortless, but that He would send along with the Father the *paraclete*, or what the Old King James Version of the Bible translated as the Comforter. And there's a little problem with that use of the term "Comforter" in translating the Greek *parakletos* because it goes back to earlier English, indeed Elizabethan English, when the English language was more closely informed by ancient Latin than it is today. And the translation "comforter" had its roots in the Latin *cum forte*. So what Jesus was saying when He was saying, "I'm going to send you a Comforter," what the King James called the Comforter, was that He was saying I'm going to send you the One who will come with strength. You know, we say a person may have a particular strength and we call it his *forte* and the use of the term *forte* is familiar to those of you who are engaged in music. You know, that little "f" or the double "ff" stands for *forte,* it means you play it with strength and with power.

And so what Jesus was saying is, I'm not sending the Holy Spirit to dry your tears, to console you, to make you feel better after you've been beaten up by your adversaries, although He does that. Rather

the promise of the coming Spirit was for power and for strength.

Now, when I talk about redemptive history, I'm talking about that whole flow and progress of how God reveals Himself in history and through history, in time and through time. And so we see certain developments of God's self-revelation in the Old Testament. And in the Old Testament, of course, the only way a person could be a believer was the same as today, they had to be born again of the Holy Ghost. So the Holy Ghost was busily engaged in the work of regeneration among the Old Testament saints, as long as indwelling them, and working together with them for their sanctification. But what's the difference then between the Old Testament situation and the New Testament situation with respect to Pentecost?

Well in the Old Testament, what we call the Charismatic endowments of power was only given by God selectively to isolate individuals, like the prophets when the Spirit of God would come upon them, or the Judges when they needed extraordinary power as Samson did to slay the Philistines. So the Spirit of the Lord would come upon them. And surely the most clearly Charismatically endowed person in the Old Testament was Moses. Moses' strength was not inherent in Moses himself, he hardly even lifted his arms without the help of Aaron and Hur, but rather Moses' miracles and Moses' leadership was worked out through this extraordinary endowment of the empowering of the Holy Ghost for his task. And keep in mind also, that Moses is called the mediator of the Old Covenant, anticipating the mediator of the New Covenant who is even more heavenly endowed by the Holy Ghost, namely our Lord Jesus Himself.

Well, there came the point in Moses' ministry where he could hardly bear the burden any longer. His father-in-law, Jethro, who inquired about all of those things that Moses was involved with rebuked Moses, telling him that he was trying to do too much with too little and advised him to get help for the leadership of the nation of Israel. And we know that Moses wrestled with God and He said, "These people are complaining day and night, they want to go back to Egypt, they want to eat their leeks and their garlics and their onions, they're sick and tired of the manna, they have manna for breakfast, manna for lunch, manna for a midnight snack, sautéed manna, fried manna, broiled manna, popped manna. Whatever they could do to change the taste. And so Moses had enough of it and he said to God, "If you love me at all, kill me now cause I can't bear with these people anymore."

Well God had a different idea. Instead of killing Moses as Moses requested, what God told Moses was this, He said, "Select for yourself seventy men whom you know to be elders of Israel and I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and distribute it to those seventy elders." And we have the record of that in the eleventh chapter of the book of Numbers. And we read, "So Moses went out…this is verse 24…and told the people the words of the Lord and he gathered the 70 men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tabernacle. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him and took of the Spirit that was upon him and placed the same upon the 70 elders. And it happened that when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, though they never did so again." But then this

interesting quirk occurs in the narrative where we read in verse 26, “But two men had remained in the camp. The name of the one was Eldad and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them and they were among those listed but who had not gone out to the tabernacle and yet they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses and said, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” I like the Old King James Version, “Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp.” Now that’s a serious matter. And so now Joshua comes and observes what’s going on and he’s livid because he assumes that this diffusion of the spiritual power that had been solely the province of Moses and is now being intimidated by these other 70 was some kind of uprising on the part of the 70 where they were trying to arrogate to themselves power and authority that belonged only to Moses. And so hear what Joshua said.

“Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, one of his choice men answered and said, ‘Moses, my lord, forbid them.’” Now Moses answered to Joshua is of great importance to our understanding ultimately of Pentecost because Moses said, “Are you envious for my sake, Joshua? Would to God that all of God’s people would be prophets and that He would put His Spirit upon them.”

You see what he’s saying is you’re jealous for my sake, Joshua? Don’t be, rejoice that God has now broadened the outpouring of the Spirit to these 70. I wish, Moses was saying, it was far broader than that. I wish that He would pour out His Spirit on every member of the house of God and that all of God’s people would be prophets.” But, of course, at this point in history, for Moses this was only a hope, this was only a prayer, a sign, a wish for the future. But that wish that was expressed by Moses became a specific prophecy later by the prophet Joel when he said in his book in chapter 2, verse 28, “It shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh, your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions, and also on my men servants and on my maid servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”

So, you see, what was first a prayer or a wish now becomes a prophecy. But it’s still a prophecy for the future. Now we fast forward to the book of Acts and we get to chapter 2 where we have the record of the original Pentecost. We read in the first verse of chapter 2 of the book of Acts these words, “When the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place, and suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind and it filled the whole house where they were sitting, and then there appeared to them divided tongues as of fire and one sat upon each of them and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

“Now those who were observing outside of the Jewish community thought they were witnessing some kind of drunken orgy and that these people were just out of their minds with drunkenness. And Peter stood in the midst and said, ‘Men of Judea, and those of you who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and heed my words, these are not drunk as you suppose since it’s only the third hour of the day, (nine o’clock in the morning), but this is that that was spoken by the prophet Joel.’ Then

Peter cites that reference in the prophecy of Joel and expounds upon it. And so the apostolic interpretation of the Day of Pentecost in the first instance was that it was a fulfillment of that prophetic utterance by Joel. And notice in passing that those who were gathered on that occasion were gathered because it was a Jewish feast and it was Jewish believers who were assembled on that occasion. And notice that when the Spirit fell on Pentecost, that all of the Jewish believers who were there received this endowment from God. So it wasn't that some people received it and some didn't. There was no question of haves and have nots among the Jewish believers.

Now, I will say at this point, that Pentecost fell upon people who had been believers and now are receiving the baptism of the Holy Ghost. And so you can see how some of our Pentecostal friends would draw from this text the idea that it's normal to believe first and then receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost, unless we understand that Pentecost has a special significance in redemptive history. This is not a description of what takes place normally in everybody's life throughout the ages, but it is a description of an event that was of momentous importance in redemptive history where God pours out His Spirit upon the whole church in fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel.

Now let me just back up for just a second and say, now when we look at the book of Acts, the book of Acts in its literary structure tends to follow the Great Commission given by Jesus. Jesus said, "Go and wait in Jerusalem till you have received power, then you shall be My witnesses…where?...Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the uttermost parts of the earth." And so, the book of Acts traces the early churches missionary movement in concentric circles beginning in Jerusalem, going to Judea, going to Samaria, to Galilee, and to the Gentile world with the missionary travels of the Apostle Paul.

Now there's two things I want us to see at this point. One is at this time in redemptive history in terms of the relationship of the Jewish community and other people, there were four distinct people groups about which the Bible was concerned in terms of where they fit in the history of redemption. You know that the tabernacle and the Temple were built in such a way that there was a certain section of it in which only Jewish people could go but there was also a court for the Gentiles and so on. But the four people groups of which the book of Acts was concerned were the Jews, the God-fearers, the Samaritans, and the Gentiles. And I think most of us are aware of at least three of those four. We're all aware of the historic antagonism that existed, they went back to intertestamental days between the Samaritans and the Jews and that the Jews had no dealings with Samaritans. We all know about the distinction between those who were Jews, those who were not Jews, namely the Gentiles. Samaritans were of a mixed heritage, part Gentile, part Jew. But there was a fourth group that was very important and that group was called the God-fearers. And the God-fearers were, for the most part, Helenistic Greeks who had converted to Judaism. They believed in *Yahweh,* the God of Israel. They embraced the teaching of Judaism. But they were not fully included in the Jewish community because they were Jews in every respect except one, they had not submitted themselves to circumcision. So they were kind of half-way in the community. So when the New Covenant comes along, the question is where do the God-fearers fit? Where do the Samaritans fit? Where do the

Gentiles fit? Because the initial group of converts were, for the most part, Jews. But as the gospel expands through the book of Acts, we see the outrage to the Samaritans, to the God-fearers, and to the Gentiles. And what we have strikingly in the book of Acts is not one Pentecost experience, but four. There are four events recorded for us in the book of Acts in which the outpouring of God the Holy Spirit is visited on certain people. And let's take a look of those, if we can.

In the eighth chapter of Acts, we have the record of what happened among the Samaritans. We read in verse 14, "Now when the Apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, chiefly through the missionary outreach and preaching of Philip, they sent Peter and John to them." So we see that the Jerusalem church gets wind of what's going on in the missionary activity in Samaria, surprising as it may have been, so they send Peter and John to investigate to see what's going on.

"And when they had come down, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit for as yet He had fallen on none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit."

So there was a mini-Pentecost among the Samaritan believers. They had received the water baptism, but they hadn't received the baptism of the Holy Spirit until Peter and John laid hands on them and then when that happened, they received the Holy Ghost. And you see then this mini-repetition of Pentecost, especially for Samaritans.

Then we go even further to the tenth chapter of the book of Acts where we have the record of Peter's encounter with Cornelius and with the God-fearers where we read in chapter 10, I'll start at verse 44 and read through 48, Peter had been preaching to this fellow Cornelius, a God-fearer and to his household. And in verse 44 we ready, "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the Word and those of the circumcision who believed were astonished as many as came with Peter because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also, for they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God."

Now listen to what Peter's response was to this particular phenomenon. "And Peter said, 'Can anyone forbid water that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord and they asked him to stay a few years…a few days."

And then we jump down, if we may, to verse 13, "Send men to Josha…to Joppa and call for Simon whose sir name is Peter, who will tell you words by which all of you and your whole household will be saved. And as I began to speak," this is Peter giving his account of it, "the Holy Spirit fell upon them as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the Word of the Lord how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'"

Now here's the conclusion of the significance of this extension of the baptism of the Holy Spirit to the God-fearers. "If therefore God gave them the same gift that He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God? And when they heard these things, they became silent and they glorified God saying, 'Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.'" This is Pentecost number three.

And in the case of the first Pentecost, all of the Jews who were assembled who were believers received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Among the Samaritan believers, all of the believers who were assembled there received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Now here Cornelius says all of the God-fearers who were assembled received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Now the conclusion that was wrought by Peter and the rest of the Apostles in Jerusalem was not a theology of have and have not, or a theology of separation temporarily between conversion and receiving the empowerment by the Holy Spirit. The significance they see in the narrative is the obvious significance is if God does to them what He did to us on the day of Pentecost, then we must receive them with all rights thereunto appertaining with full membership, full citizenship into the church without there being second-class Christians. So that now the church is made up not just of Jews, but of Jews, Samaritans and these particular Gentiles known as the God-fearers.

Well what about the ungod-fearing Gentiles? The ones who are far-removed from the Kingdom of God? Those who in the Old Testament were considered unclean pilgrims and sojourners foreigners to the Covenant?

Well to understand what happens to them, we have to fast-forward to chapter 19, where in chapter 19…we'll begin at the first verse "As it happened while Apollos was at Corinth that Paul having passed through the upper regions came to Ephesus and finding some disciples, he said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' And they said to him, 'We have not so much have even heard of the Holy Spirit.' And he said, 'Well then to what then were you baptized?' And they said, 'Into John's baptism,'…meaning John the Baptist…Then Paul said, 'John baptized indeed with the baptism of repentance saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after Him, that is on Christ Jesus.' So when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and when Paul laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. And the men were about twelve in all."

And again we see a temporal separation between the conversion of the Ephesians and their reception of the empowering gift of the Holy Spirit. But all of the Ephesians who were there that day received the Holy Ghost and were empowered for ministry. So do you see that all four people groups about which the first century church was concerned received their own Pentecost, as it were, because the point of Pentecost was to endow not some, not a few select taken out of the whole body

of Christ, but that all members of the body of Christ would be now endowed for ministry by the power and the presence of the Holy Ghost. So you have Pentecost at Jerusalem, you've got Pentecost in Samaria, you've got Pentecost with the God-fearers, and now with the Ephesian Gentiles.

Now how does that play in the New Testament? Well we know that the church that Paul established in Corinth was a church that had chronic problems with dealing with the Holy Spirit and particularly with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. So Paul had to write to them not only once but twice to try to deal with this immature first-century congregation. Clement of Rome at the end of the first century wrote another letter to the Corinthian church exhorting them to go back and read Paul's letters because they still hadn't cleaned up that mess that was in Corinth. But when Paul was dealing in his instructions with the Corinthian church, he writes these words to them in chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians.

After he talked about different gifts that are distributed by the Holy Spirit, he says in verse 12, "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body being many are one body so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free and have all been made to drink into one Spirit." So we are not many, we are not one member, but many. And here Paul again speaks of the universality of the Spirit's empowering of every believer. That's the significance of Pentecost.

Now, before we finish this section, let me take you to the epistles, to Ephesians chapter 3…excuse me, chapter 2, where Paul in dealing with his teaching about the nature of the New Testament church, again addresses this issue that threatened to divide the first-century church. And the issue was, what place, what role do the Gentles have in the body of Christ? And with it, the same question with respect to the Samaritans, "And the God-fearers?" We know that this issue became so great that it provoked the calling of the first ecumenical council, the Council of Jerusalem that is recorded in Acts 15. But now Paul again is to unfold for us his doctrine of what he calls the mystery, the *Musterion* is the word that he used, that he develops in his epistles most notably in his letter to the Colossians and his letter to the Ephesians. Now when he talks about mystery, he's not talking Alfred Hitchcock or some kind of mystery novel, Who Done It, that sort of thing. But rather he defines a *Musterion* a mystery as something that once was hidden to a degree but now is made clear and made manifest. In the Colossian epistles he said, "The mystery is that which was once hidden but now made manifest, namely Christ in you in the Gentiles, the hope of glory."

The mystery is this, that the Covenant people of God now include both Jew and Gentile, Greek, slave, free, man, woman, all these different types of people. And here's how Paul articulates that concept in Ephesians. "Therefore remember that you…he's writing to the Ephesians…who were once Gentiles in the flesh who were called uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision made in the flesh by hands, that at that time you were without Christ, you were aliens from the common wealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and were without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For

He—that is Jesus—He Himself is our peace, He was made both one and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enemy, that is the law of commandments, contained in ordinances, so to create Himself one new man, a new humanity from the two, making peace that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, therefore putting to death the enmity and He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him, through Christ, we both have access by one Spirit to the Father." This is a Trinitarian work. "Now…he says…we both have access by Christ in the Spirit to the Father."

Then he goes on, "Therefore you're no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." This all happened, this fulfillment and unveiling of the mystery of Christ and the Gentles, the hope of glory, this all happened initially with the outpouring of the Spirit upon Jew, on Samaritan, on God-fearer, and on the Gentile. And so my concern, as I said at the beginning with my Charismatic friends who put so much emphasis on Pentecost is that they have a low view of Pentecost because they see Pentecost as not being something that signaled an outpouring of God on all Christians. Well they believe that all Christians can have it, all Christians should have it, and they labor to convince others, Christians, and they believe are believers but don't have the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, though they have the zeal, they miss the point…that the pouring of the Spirit is to every Christian so that every Christian has been empowered by God. If indeed you're regenerated by the Holy Ghost, you have been gifted by the Holy Ghost. And every one of us (has been?) called to participate in the Great Commission and to engage in the Great Commission but we've been empowered for ministry to take the message of Christ to the entire world. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You that You have come by Your Spirit to us with strength and have given us the power to fulfill that mandate to go into the whole world beginning in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and then the uttermost parts of the earth, knowing that You have equipped us by Your Spirit for that ministry. We thank You that that gift is given to each who is in Christ. Amen.

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