

The Truth and Error Associated with the Day of Pentecost

Acts 2:1

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The Lord Jesus had promised a New Covenant blessing of the Holy Spirit to His apostles and Church (a greater and more extensive blessing of the Holy Spirit than had been realized in the Old Testament), and Jesus had commanded His apostles to wait in Jerusalem for this royal blessing, which Jesus promised would occur “not many days hence” (Acts 1:5). There was a particular day that God had ordained for this blessing to be bestowed upon His Church—the Day of Pentecost. It was no accident that Jesus from His throne on high blessed His people with that gift of all gifts, the Holy Spirit, on that particular day. Let us dig into the pages of Scripture that we might better understand the truth and significance of the Day of Pentecost. But let us also note and refute a couple errors associated with the Day of Pentecost that are presently being circulated within some professing Christian Churches about the Day of Pentecost. For it is important that a minister of Jesus Christ not only expound the truth, but that he also expose error.

The main points in this Lord’s Day sermon are in the form of two questions: (1) What Is Significant about the Day of Pentecost? (2) What Errors Are Associated with the Day of Pentecost?

I. What Is Significant about the Day of Pentecost?

A. What was the Day of Pentecost?

1. The Day of Pentecost was one of the three annual feast days appointed by the Lord in the Old Testament in which Israelites and proselytes (but especially all the men in the Jewish Church) were required to gather before the Lord at the tabernacle/temple: (1) Passover—

Unleavened Bread; (2) Pentecost/Weeks, and (3) Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 16:16). The Day of Pentecost was not an optional feast, but was mandatory for the men within the Jewish Church of the Old Testament, even if the family as a whole was not able to make it.

2. The Hebrew name for this feast was the Feast of Weeks because seven full weeks elapsed between the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Day of Pentecost. It was during the intertestamental period (between Malachi and the birth of Christ—approximately 425 years) that the Greek speaking Jews began to call the Feast of Weeks, the Day of Pentecost (which means “fifty”, referring to the fifty days after the Feast of Unleavened Bread).

B. What was the significance of the Day of Pentecost?

1. On the Day of Pentecost, the Lord commanded that two loaves of bread be prepared from the recent harvest and presented to the Lord as a first fruit offering to the Lord (thus acknowledging that the whole harvest came from the Lord and He was to be thankfully and joyfully acknowledged as the Giver of life in all of its forms)—Leviticus 23:17. In addition to the two loaves, sacrifices were also commanded by the Lord on the Day of Pentecost, and what was unique about the Day of Pentecost was that when God’s people gathered together they were to show their joy in God’s provision for them (physically and spiritually) by sharing God’s goodness with those in their family, with the Levites (the ministers of the Old Testament), and with the needy (Deuteronomy 16:10-11). It was not a day of fasting, but a day of feasting. An annual day of joy and thanksgiving to the Lord and bestowing upon others a portion of what the Lord had blessed each family with.

2. How is the Old Testament Day of Pentecost significant to New Testament believers?

a. First, just as God commanded that two loaves be presented as a first fruits offering to the Lord to represent all that the

Lord had and would give to His people, so the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ is called the “firstfruits” of all believers who die (1 Corinthians 15:20,23). Then we see that the gift of the Holy Spirit is called the “firstfruits” of all the blessings that God has promised to us as His adopted children by faith alone, particularly our bodily resurrection (Romans 8:23). And finally, we note that the first group of converts to Christ in Gentile nations were also called the “firstfruits” of all that God would save out of those Gentile nation (1 Corinthians 16:15). Thus, the Lord chose the Day of Pentecost as that particular day in which the Holy Spirit was poured out in New Covenant blessing as a sign that Christ the firstfruits had indeed been raised from the dead (and so would all the redeemed), that the Holy Spirit was the firstfruits blessing that guaranteed to all believers the abundance of every blessing to follow, and that the result of Christ’s resurrection and exaltation and of the gift of the Spirit would be that the gospel would go forth into the world bringing forth those initial converts from every land, people, tribe, and nation and pointing to the full harvest that would come when all of Israel is saved and when the fullness of the Gentile nations is brought into the Church at the time of the future millennial reign of Christ upon earth.

b. Second, the Day of Pentecost is significant to New Testament believers because this day of such great blessings (a New Covenant outpouring of the Holy Spirit) was a second major blessing that the Lord chose to bestow for the good of His Church on the first day of the week: (1) the resurrection of Christ (Mark 16:9); and (2) the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in New Covenant blessing (Acts 2:1; Leviticus 23:15-16—begin counting the 50 days on the morrow after the weekly sabbath, the Hebrew term *shabbat* by itself always refers to the weekly sabbath). This was the reckoning that was used by the Saducees (the high priest and the elders of the Jews) and which prevailed at the time of Christ.

(1) New Testament scholar, F.F. Bruce, states it was

this method of the Saducees that prevailed among the early Christians:

While the temple stood, their [i.e. the Saducees—GLP] interpretation would be normative for the public celebration of the festival; Christian tradition is therefore right in fixing the anniversary of the descent of the Spirit on a Sunday (*Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, p. 53, footnote 3).

(2) Interestingly, a Seventh Day Adventist scholar, Samuele Bacchiocchi, even acknowledges the strength of this method of calculating the day that on which Pentecost fell each year:

The second dating method that could be used today is to reckon the fifty days of Pentecost from the first Sunday after Passover, which means that Pentecost always would fall on a Sunday.... At this point in my research I TEND TO SUPPORT the reckoning of the fifty days of Pentecost from the first Sunday after Passover (*God's Festivals in Scripture and History*, 1:232,233).

(3) This provides another piece of evidence that the seventh day Sabbath was changed by the Lord to a first day Sabbath (or the Lord's Day): **Christ** was raised from the dead on the first day while He lay in the grave on the seventh day (Mark 16:9); **Christ** appeared to His disciples on the first day of the week when they were gathered together (John 20:19,26)—why no mention of His appearing on the seventh day?—**The exalted Christ** poured forth the chief blessing of the New Covenant on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1), which was the first day of the week—why not the seventh day of the week?—**The early church** met for worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20:6-7; 1 Corinthians 16:2)—**The Apostle John** received his revelation from Jesus Christ occurred on the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10; cp. *kuriakOS* is only used in Revelation 1:10 and 1 Corinthians 11:20=belonging to the Lord Jesus and instituted by the Lord Jesus). **The only reason why** the apostles gathered at Jewish synagogues was to proclaim the gospel to the Jews—that's where Jews congregated each week. **It was not Constantine or the Catholic Church** that changed the Sabbath from a seventh day to a first day Sabbath, the early church before 300 a.d. worshipped on the first day

of the week (or the Lord's Day).

IGNATIUS (30-107 a.d.)

Ignatius was appointed to be the bishop of Antioch about 69 a.d. This epistle was most likely written 98-107 a.d. He was noted to be a disciple of the Apostle John. Ignatius describes the shift from observing the Jewish Sabbath to observing the Christian Lord's Day.

Those who have come to the possession of new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of THE LORD'S DAY, on which also our life has sprung up again, by him and by his death (Ignatius, *Epistle to the Magnesians*, Ch. IX, emphases added).

JUSTIN MARTYR (110-165 a.d.)

ON THE DAY CALLED SUNDAY is an assembly of all who live either in cities or in the rural districts, and the memoirs of the apostles [i.e. the inspired writings of the apostles found in the New Testament--GLP] and the writings of the prophets are read BUT SUNDAY IS THE DAY ON WHICH WE ALL HOLD OUR COMMON ASSEMBLY, because it is the first day on which God dispelled the darkness and the original state of things and formed the world, and because Jesus our Savior rose from the dead upon it (Justin Martyr, *First Apology of Justin*, Ch. LXVII, emphases added).

C. Thus, the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 holds great significance for New Covenant believers because it brought to realization and fulfillment the meaning of the firstfruits offering that God had promised in the Old Testament to His people in the New Testament; and the Day of Pentecost becomes another confirmation that the Lord Jesus (who is Lord of the Sabbath) has changed the seventh day Sabbath to a first day Sabbath in which we are to rejoice in the finished work of Christ each Lord's Day.

II. What Errors Are Associated with the Day of Pentecost?

A. The first error associated with the Day of Pentecost is the error that teaches that the Day of Pentecost was when the Church was first formed or created (the birthday of the Church). Dispensationalism promotes the false teaching that Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament are essentially distinct from one another, whereas a covenantal view of Scripture teaches that the Church was not

born on the Day of Pentecost, but rather was born in the Old Testament and continued with greater blessings on the Day of Pentecost. The truth is that just as there was a New Testament Church, so there was an Old Testament Church that preceded it. In other words, the Old Testament Church and the New Testament Church are not essentially different, but rather are essentially the same (the difference being the outward administration of ordinances between the Old Testament and the New Testament). The Scripture teaches an essential continuity between the Church of the Old Testament and the Church of the New Testament, whereas this error promotes an essential discontinuity between the Church of the Old Testament and the Church of the New Testament. Note the following scriptural truths pointing to the essential oneness of the Church in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament.

1. The word “church” (*ekklesia*) is used not only for the New Testament Church, but is also used for the Old Testament Church (Acts 7:38). This Greek word for “church” (*ekklesia*) was also used many times in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew phrases for “the congregation of Israel” or “the assembly of Israel” (in other words, “the church of Israel”).

2. The essential constitution is the gospel of Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:8; Hebrews 4:1-2) and the moral law of God (Matthew 5:17-19). The Church of the Old Testament was looking forward to the gospel work of Christ, and the Church of the Old Testament is looking back to the gospel work of Christ. Essentially, the same gospel was preached—the gospel of grace through faith alone in Christ alone (Abraham and David in Romans 4).

3. Jesus Christ was necessarily the Savior/Mediator in both the Old Testament Church and the New Testament Church by way of His Covenant of Grace (Galatians 3:17; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4; Hebrews 11:26).

4. The Old Testament Church and the New Testament Church are essentially the same kingdom (Matthew 21:43), the same person

(Galatians 4:1-7), and the same olive tree (Romans 11:16-24).

5. When Christ declares in Matthew 16:18, “I will build my church”, I submit that He does not mean “I will begin building my church”, but rather “I will continue building my church” (**Philippians 1:18**; Romans 6:2). If the Church of the Old Testament and of the New Testament is essentially the same, the membership is also essentially the same—both adults and children who are both entitled to the same sign of membership in Christ’s Church.

B. The second error is found in those Churches that teach that the Old Testament Day of Pentecost ought specifically to be an annual celebration within Christian Churches.

1. There are those who continue to celebrate the Day of Pentecost as an Old Testament feast (Hebrew Roots Movement, Messianic Jews, etc.). In fact, there are those in this camp who would teach that all of the Old Testament feasts ought to be celebrated with the Christian Church. They point to the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 as well as Paul’s statement that he was seeking to be in Jerusalem by the time of the celebration of the Day of Pentecost (Acts 20:16). What shall we say in response to this growing movement that brings the Old Testament ceremonies into the Christian religion?

a. Although the Church of the Old Testament and the Church of the New Testament are essentially the same as to the same essential constitution (the gospel of Jesus Christ received by faith alone and the moral law of God or Ten Commandments as God’s standard of sanctification), nevertheless, what is different between the Church of the Old Testament and the Church of the New Testament is that the Old Testament shadows of the priesthood, the temple, the sacrifices, the ceremonies, and the dietary laws have been abolished and are no longer legally binding upon the Church of the New Testament (Hebrews 10:1; Colossians 2:16-17; Acts 10:11-15).

b. Finally, those examples of the apostles observing some Old Testament ceremony were not intended as examples for Christians in subsequent ages to follow, but were temporarily intended to prevent a stumbling block to Jewish converts whose consciences were tender in wanting to obey the Lord but whose consciences yet doubted that they were no longer legally bound by the Old Testament ceremonies (Ephesians 2:14-15). Paul's desire to be in Jerusalem by the time of Pentecost (Acts 20:16) does not necessarily indicate his desire to celebrate Pentecost, but perhaps simply to present the gospel to so many Jews that would be gathering in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost.

2. There are also those Churches that observe a religious calendar: Lent, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, Christmas etc.

a. Dear ones, none of these religious days of celebration have been appointed by the Lord in the New Testament—therefore their celebration is appointed by the tradition of man, not by the commandment of God (Jesus rejected all such traditions of man, Mark 7:8). The weekly Lord's Day is the only specific holy day appointed by the Lord in New Testament, wherein we celebrate the finished work of Christ.

b. At least the Jewish converts (in Romans 14) that were struggling with the Old Testament holy days being legally abolished by the death of Christ were struggling over holy days that were actually appointed by the Lord in the Old Testament. However, the holy days that Christians now want to celebrate have no divine appointment, but are rather mere "will-worship" appointed by man (Colossians 2:23). Listen to sermon series on the religious and non-religious celebration of Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, etc.

Such errors may not seem that important to be concerned about, but dear ones, they are adding to or subtracting from the finished work of Christ. They are taking us back to the Old Testament ceremonies (the Church's infancy) or back to the traditions of men. In either case it is a

matter of distorting the clear presentation of the gospel of Christ who came to do away with all shadows that pointed to Christ and to do away with all commandments of men in doctrine and worship. In so doing they detract from Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith.

At a time in which there is so much sorrow, grief, and heartache in the world (wars, tyranny, terrorist attacks, the slaughter of men, women, and children as in Paris and Lebanon this past week and in Kenya and Nigeria in the past year), the Lord has given to us a weekly appointed day of feasting and joy together as Christians to remember all that Christ has freely given to us by His death, resurrection, ascension, and pouring forth the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost—all unique events accomplished by Christ because He loves you, His people, with an everlasting love.

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