Pentecost 11

Acts 2:41 REV

Then those who received his word were baptized, and in that day there were added to their number about 3,000 souls.

What a day! About 3000 were saved – born again – heaven bound, and all hell couldn’t stop them from going! You know that Satan was confused. Because God hid much of the details of what Christ would accomplish, Satan was probably the most surprised one around as his decision to kill God’s son looked increasingly like a suicidal mistake. Spirit-filled ones went from one (Jesus) to 12 (apostles) to about 3,000 in a couple of months! Instead of one person to fight, it was turning into an army to battle. Now, this newly saved “troop” needed next steps, and this is what they did.

Acts 2:42

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

Let’s discus two popular wrong ideas offered for the newly saved to begin their Christian life. The first wrong idea is that after the new birth those saved are transformed into perfection by the spirit.

2 Cor. 5:17 KJV

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

This verse in the KJV seems to say that when a person gets saved “all things are become new”. Is this true? Does their hair color change? Do they gain an inch in height? Zits disappear? In my experience the answer is “No”. “All’ things do not become new according to most observers. Do you know why? Because the Greek text doesn’t have the word “all” in verse 17. Here is more accurate translation.

2 Cor 5:17 REV

So then, if anyone is in union with Christ, he is a new creation, the old things have passed away, Look!, things have become new.

After salvation, for the most part man’s body and soul stay the same – same hair color, height, and skin. The same personality inherited from our parents and molded by our environment continues. What’s new is that which has been “created” (a new creation) and that’s the spirit. Before being saved, there was no spirit within, only body and soul. When a person is saved, God, the Holy Spirit, creates a little bit of Himself, holy spirit, in the believer and he becomes body, soul, and spirit, a three-part person. The spirit is perfect, but the body and soul aren’t. In the future Christ will redeem and transform our imperfect body.

Romans 8:23

And not only that, but we ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the spirit, even we ourselves keep groaning within ourselves, eagerly waiting for our adoption, the redemption of our body.

Phil 3:20,21

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

who will transform our lowly body so it will be in the same form as his glorious body, by the power that also enables him to subject all things to himself.

Our bodies may not be perfect now, but they will be at Christ’s return. Until then we can claim what Christ accomplished to heal our bodies and renew our minds now.

A second errant idea for the newly saved saint’s progress is that the spirit should exclusively lead them. This idea is usually accompanied by this verse.

1 John 2:27 KJV

But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

The idea goes like this: “Once you have God’s spirit, it can lead and teach you. You don’t need any man to teach you – the spirit does.” The first thing I want to say is, “Don’t we wish that was the case?” I sure do! Just follow the spirit and there will be no more problems, perfect understanding, and no more sin. If only… ! The second thing I’ll say is that the rest of the Bible contradicts that verse. For example:

Eph. 4:11,12

And he gave some to be apostles, and some to be prophets, and some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,

for the equipping of the holy ones for the work of ministry, with the goal of building up the body of Christ,

Christ gave teachers and teachers are people. Ephesians says we need teachers while 1 John says we don’t need any man to teach us. What’s the answer? Look at the context of 1 John 2.

1 John 2: 18-19 REV

O little children, it is the last hour, and just as you heard that an antichrist is coming, and already many antichrists have come, and so we know that it is the last hour.

They went out from us, but they were not really from us; for if they had been from us, they would have remained with us. But they went out with the result that it was revealed that none of them are from us.

Because of the love and warmth of the Christian church, lost souls are always attracted to us as a moth is to a flame. Regrettably, some want the fruit of the spirit without getting the spirit, which can only come from the Lord Jesus. Some still want to be their own lord. They are anti-Christ. Church leadership should allow the visitors enough exposure to the saints for salvation, but not for too long so that worldly contamination enters and takes root. There is usually a steady stream of people flowing in and out of the church based on their decisions about Christ. The pro-Christ stay, the anti-Christ go.

1 John 2:20-24 REV

And you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.

I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth.

Who is the liar if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist: the one who denies the Father and the Son.

Everyone who denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.

As for you, that which you have heard from the beginning must remain in you! If what you have heard from the beginning remains in you, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.

The saints addressed in this epistle had heard and believed the gospel from the original twelve apostles. They had the anointing (the spirit) and knowledge about Christ. They had no church epistles yet because it had not been revealed to Paul and others. So, the basics about the new birth - Christ is lord, walk in love, walk by the spirit, walk in holiness, he’s coming back, and will soon usher in the kingdom of heaven, etc. is what they knew and lived. Those anti-Christ people were challenging the saints’ beliefs and practice. The “anti’s” probably believed in God as a general concept, but not in Christ as God’s son and our lord and savior. They thought you could have a relationship with God without Christ. Errrr! (Game-show Buzzer) That’s not happening! “That which you have heard from the beginning must remain in you!” “Hold on to the gospel, guys!” John in essence exhorts.

1 John 2:25,26 REV

And this is the promise that he himself promised us: life in the age to come.

I have written these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.

The anti-Christ folks were trying to lead the saints astray with different ideas about who Christ was and what he accomplished. They were saying Christ was a spirit being, a projection of God. Some said Christ was never in the flesh, died or was bodily resurrected. These beliefs came from Greek philosophy and were addressed throughout 1 John. The context is about “those who are trying to lead you astray”.

1 John 2:27 REV

And as for you, the anointing that you received from him remains in you, and you do not need for anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you remain in him.

John tells the saints he addresses “you do not need for anyone (in context - those who are trying to lead you astray) to teach you”. Those anti-Christ folks were trouble, perverting the pure good news of Christ to be replaced by some far-out philosophy.

The idea of new Christians being led by the spirit only, is technically possible, but practically impossible. This is why God gave teachers in Ephesians 4 and the new saints on Pentecost “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching”. The process of spiritual maturity starts with first getting the spirit and then beginning to learn what you got. How did the new Pentecost saints learn what God gave them and how to live it? The apostles taught them, just as Jesus had taught the apostles. The spirit didn’t primarily teach the apostles, Jesus did. This is the pattern that passed on to the new saints at Pentecost.

Because God respects man’s free will, He does not transform man’s mind to accommodate his new spiritual aspect received at the new birth. In fact, the newly reborn one’s brain is hardly impacted at all when they acquire holy spirit. Although they have a new Master and desire to please him, if they liked chocolate before getting saved, they probably still like it after. If they were a professional painter before, they probably still paint after salvation. What the newly saved need is training in spiritual matters – how to figuratively “ride their tricycle with three wheels and not just two” in obedience to their new lord as we discussed.

2 Pet. 1:2-4

Grace and peace be multiplied to you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

By his divine power he has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and excellence.

Through these he has given to us precious and exceedingly great promises, so that through them you become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of evil desires.

The spirit of God we receive in the new birth is what I call a “little bit of the divine nature”. As we receive and believe “the precious and exceedingly great promises” that comes from “the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and excellence”, we can “become partakers of the divine nature”. Man transforms from fear to freedom, from despair to victory, and from insecure to loved. We “metamorph” from a spiritual worm to a butterfly and learn to fly above the evil spiritual gravity of this present world.

1 Pet. 2:2

As newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you grow up in your salvation.

It is the word of God that allows us to grow up in our salvation and walk by the spirit. Now there is many forms that comprise “the word of God”.

Mat 4:4

But he answered and said, “It is written, Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”

The scriptures are “the word of God”, right?

2 Tim 3:16

All Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness,

Sure, but that’s not the only way “the word of God” comes to us. The first scripture was written about 1500 BC. Was there “word that proceeded out of the mouth of God” in the 2500 years before? Sure. Was there more of the same during and after the scriptures were recorded and circulated? Again, sure. Therefore, there are several ways the word of God comes to us:

1. Scripture (Men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.)
2. Direct revelation from God or Jesus. (Spiritual anointing teaches us.)
3. Another person speaks the revelation they got or are getting.

Some religious traditions teach that only by scripture alone can a Christian conduct their life. This approach ignores personal revelation and inspiration. It also negates prophesy and gift ministers (and others) getting revelation and sharing it in the church. I don’t believe that God made the universe for the earth, the earth for man, and man to live by the scriptures, right? He made man to fellowship with Him! That fellowship should begin with the scriptures, but it should end with each of us walking and talking with God directly, and regularly “quality controlling” the revelation, comparing it with scripture.

The scriptures and the teaching of others (like the apostles) provide the guidelines, the foundation, the structure by which new Christians learn who God and Jesus truly are, and what the qualities of the new spirit within them are. The spirit of God may be born in us at salvation, but the accurate knowledge of God, Jesus, holy spirit, and many other new birth realities are not. They must be learned. And many times, wrong information must be unlearned before the correct teaching can be known and practiced. For example:

Acts 8:5-8

And Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ.

And the multitudes, with one accord, were paying attention to the things that were spoken by Philip when they heard and saw the signs that he did.

For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, were coming out of many people who had them, and many who had been paralyzed or lame were healed.

And there was much joy in that city.

What a tremendous time! The devil was on the run and multitudes are getting saved. But that is just the start for spiritual health and growth.

Acts 8-13a

But there was a certain man, Simon by name, who before that time used sorcery in the city, and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was someone great,

to whom they all paid attention, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is that power of God that is called Great.”

And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his sorceries.

But when they believed Philip, who was proclaiming the good news about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

And Simon also himself believed,

Sizzling sorcerers! Simon gets saved? Yes, it’s “whoever believes in Christ, shall not perish but have everlasting life.” Grace is grace. Earned is not grace. Simon didn’t earn salvation, that’s for sure. He was a community organizer of evil spirits for Samaria, meaning he was harboring and operating some powerful demons. But when he saw the miracles Phillip did and heard about the Lord Jesus, he believed and was born again. Did this clean out his mind of wrong thinking and evil spirits? Regrettably, no.

Acts 8:13-14

And Simon also himself believed, and being baptized, he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles being done, he was amazed.

Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John,

*It should be noted that the Greek word translated “accepted” in verse 14 is dechomai*, meaning “to receive, take, receive, grasp, accept.” Philip sent for the apostles in Jerusalem because the reaction to the gospel was strange in Samaria. They believed and got the spirit (*dechomai*), they just didn’t manifest it outwardly by speaking in tongues. This was the first time recorded this happened. What was wrong? Philip called “911”, Peter and John.

Acts 8:15-17

who, when they had come down, prayed for them to receive holy spirit into manifestation,

for as yet it had not rushed onto any of them, they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Then they laid their hands on them, and they received holy spirit into manifestation.

This Greek word translated “receive” in verse 15 and 17 is *lambano*, meaning “to receive, take and use”. The saved folks in Samaria initially received (*dechomai*) the word of God, but finally received (*lambano*) the spirit, speaking in tongues. What had hindered them? In context, Samaria had a lot of sorcery going on pre-Philip so there were probably lots of evil spirits involved in many aspects of the people’s lives and culture. Some of the spirits were evicted in verse 7, but some were still stubbornly hiding. Just like an unpaying renter who needs to get evicted, the “authorities” got involved to deliver the removal order. Peter and John used discerning of spirits, faith, miracles, and healing on the Samaritans’ behalf to remove the hinderances short circuiting them from manifesting God’s spirit and freedom.

Acts 8:18-23

Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the spirit was given, he offered them money,

saying, “Give me also this power, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands, receives holy spirit into manifestation.”

But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you assumed the gift of God could be purchased with money.

You have no part or share in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

Therefore, repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that the intent of your heart is forgiven you.

For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of unrighteousness.”

In the past Simon the sorcerer had “put evil spirits on people”. It’s what he used to do for a living. When he saw Peter and John take evil spirits out of and off people, helping them manifest holy spirit, he wanted that power also. Wait a minute! Wasn’t Simon born again in verse 13? Why is he still confused about spiritual things? Because the new spirit does not mean a new mind - or new motivations, or habits, or an evil spirit clean house. Why not? Because God honors free will – more than most people wish He did! He respectfully allows man’s decision to do good or evil. Although saved, Simon wanted to get back in the spiritual authority business where he got paid for wielding spiritual influence. Simon’s thinking, motivation and professional choices were wrong – and not surprisingly for one who was so deceived and deceiving. He needed big-time repentance. And as with alcoholism, he should “get the alcoholic to stop working at the bar”. Simon needed to get a common job – disconnected from what he used to do, probably elsewhere than Samaria and dedicate himself to the apostle’s doctrine and learn to walk by the holy spirit, not the unholy ones with which he was so familiar.

Simon needed some hard and fast scripture and clear doctrine (and some accountability, as we shall see). He could not trust his own mind, programmed by years of unholy spiritual influence. He could not trust his inner voice, from which demons had been consistently whispering to him. His ideas were still nuts, even with Peter, John and Phillip standing right in front of him. He had little grasp of grace, the manifestations, ministries, God’s ability to supply needs, bitterness, and unrighteousness, to mention a few of his obvious deficits. Although saved, he was still a mess. He could not be trusted to “walk by the spirit” initially after salvation, because he demonstrated he would “walk – right by – the spirit”!

This is probably true for most of us after salvation. We get a new spirit but have many of the same old mental programming and habits. In a perfect world, we should be able to listen to the new spirit God gives us at salvation. The problem is we have never lived that way before and are usually strangers to God’s voice. Scripture and doctrinal teaching give the spiritual neophyte clear guidelines as to who God and His son are and how they think and act. It also defines what God had done for us in Christ and what we can (and should not) do now. Simon needed this desperately, plus a steady dose of fellowship as we will discuss in upcoming chapters. Simon’s old mental programming would continue until he re-programmed his mind with God’s will, using scripture and inspired words from others such as Peter. This growth is called “the renewing of your mind” in Romans 12:2. Because there is much teaching on “the renewed mind” we will let the reader go elsewhere for those specifics. We are just dealing with the broad strokes in Acts.

Simon (nor any other spiritual newbie) was ill equipped to walk by the spirit for very long to any degree of accuracy, having never done it before. And that is even true without any evil spiritual opposition, which seems to usually pop up when the light shines bright, and the “roaches” start to scatter. I remember teaching a newbie once how to pray with confidence and the next day he thanked me explaining that “God had blessed” him with a larger than average bag of marijuana in response to his prayers! Whoa! We had some clarification discussion after that! There’s lots for the newbies to learn.

Sola Scriptura

There are those in the Christian church that decry the use of scripture because of its over promotion to the saints as the “all in all”. These folks usually have nothing against scripture itself. They object to the constant exhortation to “look to scripture” instead of “look to God”. This over emphasis on scripture - sola scriptura in Latin ("by scripture alone" in English) - is a theological doctrine held by some Protestant’s that posits the Christian scriptures as the sole infallible source of authority for Christian faith and practice. Certainly, new believers should begin with scripture, but that is not the end of the Christian growth program.

1 Cor. 2:12

Now we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit that is from God, so that we can know the things that were freely given to us by God.

The same God who inspired the scripture inspires us personally “so that we can know the things that were freely given to us by God.” The scriptures help us to discern what is and isn’t godly.

Heb. 4:12

For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, even piercing as far as the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and is able to judge the considerations and intentions of the heart.

Simon needed scripture about sorcery to discern that the spirits he formerly entertained were not from the true God. He had no ability to “divide soul and spirit” yet and “judge the considerations and intentions of the heart”. The word of God revealed in scripture is something in the senses realm that he could hold on to and use to resist the spiritual influences still fighting over him and build his under-developed, spiritually immature mind. He needed to quote scripture and resist Satan as Jesus did. In that context the spirit within him could help and /or add some more firepower against the devil.

So, the first thing the newly born-again Christians on Pentecost did was to “devote themselves to the apostle’s doctrine”. And part of that doctrine was to ultimately look to God directly to get their needs met. What a time it must have been!

