

PENTECOST: THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH

Pentecost is traditionally known as the birthday of the church. When the Holy Spirit came down, It empowered the Christians to be and do the work of the church.

It can be said, alternatively, that the church was established in Jesus' teaching: *"Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.'*" That rather describes an established church right then.

Nevertheless, sticking with tradition, Pentecost started the church. And we are not talking about All Saints' Church or any individual church, but the "church" from a theological perspective.

I. First, who IS the church. The church is a portion of human society unlike all others. It is the people associated with heaven. We ARE a heavenly colony on earth. We are *"Thy kingdom come"* now; we are *"Thy will be done"* now; we are *"on earth as it is in heaven"* now. The church is a transcendent society; we belong to the age to come. We belong to the age to come, but we are here now.

We, as the church, have a different ethic than the society of the world about us. We don't cheat on our taxes. We don't shop lift; we don't steal. We don't blow up airplanes. Whatever new morality or ethic the world begins to adopt, we stay with the one that comes from God: *"Thy will be done ... on earth"* - we are the ones that do it. If everyone were like us, we wouldn't need locks or security systems. Our doors could be left open. You could put all your cash on a table on your front porch - I'd suggest you put a brick on it so it won't blow away - and no one would take it. It would still be there when you returned. Grocery stores could remain open all night without anyone working there. There could be a "change table" where you go after you get all your groceries. You could add up the costs and then leave your money, get whatever change was needed, and walk out. That's how the world would be if everyone in it were like me!

We have a different economy. We give. We give time, we give money, we give clothing, we give blood. God gives to us, we give to others. The more we give to others, the more He gives to us. Wealth is not our goal in life; our goals are love and

heaven.

One of our members was in line at a grocery store where he witnessed this fellow attempting to pay for a small amount of groceries. His debit card was refused. He had another; it too was refused. Our member pulled out his own credit card and instructed the cashier to use it to pay for the man's groceries. The gentleman looked at him amazed and asked, "Why would you do that?" Good question: "Why?" The answer: "God has been good to me, should I not be good to others?" This is the economy of the Kingdom of God.

We have a different purpose in life. Our purpose is to "glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Our goal is to learn to love God, then love Him by loving other people in this world, then loving ourselves. And our love is demonstrated by laying our lives down, for Him and for the people He put on this earth.

II. Mission: What is the mission of the church? It is to GO. Matthew 28 says (18-20), *"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.'"*

We go. What we have in Christ is not meant to be kept to ourselves but to pass on to others. In going, we never need to leave town, but always working our Christian influence into the lives of those with whom we come in contact. We go into the society of this world, that's where we "go." If you run up to the grocery store or a local restaurant, you "go." If you go to bridge club, you "go." We "go" into the society around us.

We go with prayer, with the word of God, and with the testimony of what He has done in our lives. If we have God's love, it's only natural to want the other people we love also to be saved through Jesus Christ.

If it does involve foreign missions, we will go there. But wherever we live, that is where we "go."

III. Membership: Who is a member of the church? All who believe and are baptized. I don't know why everyone doesn't want to "get in on the action." But many ears are still closed and eyes shut.

The truth is: we didn't join the church, He got us. 1 John 4:19 says, "*We love, because God first loved us.*" We didn't join the Body of Christ, He enjoined us to say "yes" and become part of the sacred community. We are like St. Paul in that regard. God found Paul on the road to Damascus. Paul asked, "*Who are you, Lord?*" *The Lord answered, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do."* Notice, Jesus didn't ask Paul anything; He just said, "get up and go ... and you will be told ..."

In Galatians 2:20, we read, "*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives within me.*" And in Colossians 3:3, "*For (I) have died, and (my) life is hidden with Christ in God.*" We belong to Him now, and He lives His life through us. I have no rights! I have NO rights. People are always wanting their rights. Those of us who are baptized, believing Christians have surrendered our rights. We surrendered our rights when we became baptized Christians. We belong to Him, and we do whatever He wants us to do. That's what it means to be crucified with Christ. That's what it means to be a member of His church.

The church is One, and it includes all the faithful who have gone on before us and, as well, all those yet to come.

IV. Visible and Invisible: There is a visible and an invisible church.

The visible church is the people of the structure of the church, with all its organization and leadership. We live in a physical world, and by God's design, we make up a physical, visible church.

But there is also an invisible church: All the baptized true believers who follow and serve Christ, everywhere. There may be many we know nothing about - believers known to God alone. They, too, belong to the invisible church.

The visible church has in it many members who are pseudo-Christians – people who have not entered through the door, as Jesus said. Jesus is the Door, and all true believers enter into the sheepfold (the true, invisible church) through Him. The pseudo-Christian "*does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in by another way. That*

man is a thief and a robber” Jesus said (John 10:1).

Knowing this would be the case, Jesus gave us a parable so we could understand what was happening in the church.

Parable of the wheat and the tares, Matthew 13:24-30. *“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. So, when the plants came up and bore grain, the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the householder came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he said, ‘No; lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers to gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”*

Our battle, as Christ’s body, the church, is not against just the unbelieving world, but also the devil’s infiltration into the visible church. The devil’s infiltrators are not part of the invisible church, but are amongst us.

We’ve heard the parable; we shouldn’t be surprised that they are here. They do the devil’s work, they don’t follow the faith and morality the Bible teaches. They will be part of the visible church until the end of time when the harvest – the judgment – occurs: the day when the wheat, the true invisible church, is separated from the weeds.

The devil misleads people with half-truths. He always has. That’s what he did with Eve in the Garden of Eden, that’s what he has done ever since.

The liberalism of the world’s society and the devil’s workers in the church are everywhere, but we shall remain the true church.

We are the true church. This defines who we are.

This defines the kind of people we must be.

This defines what we do.