

Encounters with Christ

Part 7: Pentecost

Acts 2:1-4

1. Power over self.

- *1 Peter 2:1-3*

- **Selfish grace:**

- *Hebrews 6:1-3*

- **Salvation.**

- *Philippians 2:1-8; Romans 8:13-15;
Colossians 3:5; Galatians 2:20, 5:24-25;
John 17:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:23*

- **Sanctification.**

- *Romans 8:13-15; Colossians 3:5; Galatians
2:20, 5:24-25; John 17:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:23*

2. Power to serve.

- *Galatians 5:13; Ephesians 6:7; 1 Peter 4:10; Matthew 25:34-40; Mark 10:45*

3. Power to share.

- *Acts 1:8, 4:31*

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Michael O'Neill

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I want to show you something; this is a baseball card from my collection, it's a 1956 card of Yogi Berra. I've actually got quite a few cards – several thousand, actually – and this is one of my favorites, along with some Mickey Mantle cards, Willie Mays, Lou Gehrig, Roberto Clemente, a whole bunch. One of the things I like about Yogi Berra is that he wasn't just a star baseball player; he had quite a personality on and off the field. He was known as much for being a great catcher for the Yankees as he was for his "maxims." He's been quoted as saying such wisdom-bending things like, "Baseball is ninety percent mental and the other half is physical." "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." "It ain't over till it's over," and, "It's like Déjà-vu all over again."

There's a great story of a time that Yogi was playing in a game and the score was tied with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning. The other team was up to bat and Yogi was catching. The batter stepped into the batter's box and, being a good Catholic, the batter made the sign of the cross on the dust on home plate with his bat. Yogi was a Catholic too, and he used his catcher's glove to wipe off the plate. As he did it he said to the batter, "Why don't we let God just watch this game?"

That's actually not bad theology when it comes to a baseball game or sporting events, but it's terrible theology when it comes to the way we live our Christian lives and carry out the work of the church. You see, for some of us, we live our lives like Yogi suggested; God is in attendance but he's just sitting in the stands as a spectator. We might even let Him have the best seat in the stadium of our Christian lives. We might even let Him throw in the ceremonial first pitch. Yet rarely do we let Him get in the game.

But God doesn't want to be a spectator in your life; nor will He simply stay in His seat. He created you to participate with him in his Kingdom purposes; He wants to move in and through you for His work in the world.

You are here to make a difference for Him, and His desire, his intention, his will is to work in your life to "win the game," which is to help him bring the Kingdom of his Love here on earth as it is in Heaven, and in the process, introducing people to Jesus.

¹ Resources:

- Francis Dixon, <https://www.wordsoflife.co.uk/bible-studies/study-6-disciples-prayer-upper-room/>
- Philip A. Bence, *Acts: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1998)
- John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016)
- Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985)

God will do that through His presence in your life, which is the Holy Spirit. This is why Jesus died on the cross for you and rose from the dead, allowing you to be forgiven so the Holy Spirit could fill your life and you become the Temple for the Spirit to reside, according to 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. Here's what it means for your life to be a temple of the Holy Spirit: your life becomes the place that people can experience God, where God's purposes are accomplished, and God is glorified. That's what a temple is for. But for your life to be a residence for his Holy presence, it first has to be cleansed. He is holy, after all.

God the Father created you and loves you, but since he is holy, he must judge you and hold you accountable for your sin. But he didn't want you to be condemned. God so loves the world he gave his only Son – *God the Son* – to reveal his heart and plan for you, to be the sacrifice for you, and to rise from the dead so you won't have to die. Having done that, Jesus now rules and reigns in heaven and desires to rule and reign on earth in people's hearts. So he sent *God the Spirit* to live in you, giving you the power to resist sin and to be Jesus in this world, loving others, defending the poor and oppressed, being generous with your life. There you go folks: that's the Trinity, and that's the "why" behind Scripture. That's the fullness of the Trinity's work in your life. That's what this journey between Easter and today has been leading us to – from fear to faith to the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Today on this Pentecost Sunday we want to see what this power is that God gives us through his Spirit and what it will do in our lives. Let's start by reviewing what the Bible records of this amazing event of Pentecost. I'm only going to read the first four verses of that amazing story from Acts chapter two, but still, would you please stand with me as I read it to us:

When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force--no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them. (Acts 2:1-4, tmt)

This is the Word of God, for the people of God: thanks be to God. Thank you for standing; please have a seat. In this one event these ordinary men and women were completely transformed; they were suddenly filled with a wisdom and insight and power that they had never known before, even for all their years walking side-by-side with Jesus. And this is the *same* experience and transformation and power that is available to each of us who have put our faith in Christ, if we will allow him. It may not happen in the same way, but the same Spirit can fill your life.

Because of what God did at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is available to every believer for...

1. Power over *self*.

This is significant because the self – our selfishness, self-focus, self-preservation, our sinfulness, *must* be dealt with. This begins at the time you are saved. When Jesus died on the cross, He did what we could never do for ourselves and what He never needed to do for Himself: He died to pay the penalty for sin—not His own (he didn't have any), but for yours and mine. *We needed* Him to save us. The Bible is very clear that apart from Christ we are lost, we are sheep who have gone astray, we are dead in sin. We may be alive physically and mentally, but spiritually we are dead and destined for eternity in hell. We are in deep need of help, and we can't do anything about it on our own. So when we come to the point of accepting Christ into our lives, we do it because we are needy. We are overwhelmed with difficulties, trouble, guilt, and grief. We are hurting and we need healing. We have messed up our lives and we need Jesus to straighten everything out. We don't want to die and go to Hell; we want to know we are going to Heaven. Right? All of those things are true. We come to Jesus because in some way we are in deep, deep need of help and He's the only One who can help us. After all, Jesus said:

“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”
(Matthew 11:28-30)

Aren't you glad we can come to Jesus and find all the forgiveness and help and hope and answers we need!

So when we trust Him to save us, we become Christians—the Bible describes us as “new creations.” We are new in our faith, newly made alive in our spirits, and new members of the family of God. That's why the Bible instructs new Christians this way:

“Like newborn babies, crave spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.”
(1 Peter 2:2-3, niv)

The pure spiritual milk is that we begin experiencing God, reading His Word, being with his family, and we are to drink it all in regularly. We are spiritual babies.

Now, I'm not an expert on babies, but Shelly and I did have three of them, and on occasion I've been accused of behaving like one. So here's one thing I know about babies: they are very self-centered. To a baby, he or she is the center of the universe. In the minds of babies, their parents exist to feed them, burp them, and clean up whatever that uncomfortable smelly stuff is that somehow keeps suddenly appearing in their diapers. But a baby only wants you to do things when *he* wants it done, and immediately.

So a baby will cry and fuss at you until you do what he wants, but if you don't do it right away or try doing it when he doesn't want it, he'll cry and fuss at you for that, too. In fact, he cries to get his diaper changed and he cries when you change him. He cries because he's tired and he cries when you put him to bed. Babies are very selfish. We don't get upset with them for that; they just are.

Now, when God in his Word calls us newborn babies, I'm sure he wasn't thinking about *that*, was he? Of course He was!

That's what we are when we first become Christians. Nobody faults a baby for being a baby; a baby doesn't know any better. But as the baby grows up, it soon learns that there are other people in the world, and hopefully starts taking others into consideration, learns the value of interpersonal relationships, becomes less selfish, and eventually becomes a contributing member of society, right? There's nothing worse than a baby who becomes a teenager and then an adult but continues acting like a baby, believing that the world still revolves around him or her. In the same way, no one faults a new Christian for thinking that God exists to serve them and solely to meet their every need. And God is more than happy as a loving parent to meet our needs as spiritual infants. But God expects us to grow up. There is nothing worse than an adult Christian who still acts like a baby.

When we first become Christians, our understanding of the relationship we have with God is one of...

selfish grace.

We are immature, and we believe that the grace of God is solely for us and our needs. But we must grow up sometime folks, and there are too many Christians who are adults but still treat God as if He exists for them. And while God will always be our Father and meet our needs, God *pleads* with us to grow up. Listen to what He says to us in His Word:

So come on, let's leave the preschool fingerpainting exercises on Christ and get on with the grand work of art. Grow up in Christ. The basic foundational truths are in place: turning your back on "salvation by self-help" and turning in trust toward God; baptismal instructions; laying on of hands; resurrection of the dead; eternal judgment. God helping us, we'll stay true to all that. But there's so much more. Let's get on with it! (Hebrews 6:1-3, tmt)

When we first come to Christ, it really is a...

(selfish grace:) for salvation.

It's pretty much all about ourselves and what we need and want. We have a new capacity to be loved and to love, but we're still babies. And that's fine, but we can't stay in spiritual kindergarten. So a person who doesn't mature becomes a selfish-grace Christian.

What are the signs of a selfish-grace Christian? It's usually someone who goes through life as Christians mostly concerned for themselves and their own well-being. "God is only here to bless *me*."

Spiritually infant Christians don't spend much time in prayer with God, unless it's for their own needs. They don't serve Him wholeheartedly or selflessly. Their faith is mostly for what they can get from God, not what they can give to God and others. They usually don't get serious about God—at least not until a crisis comes up, and *then* they will quickly run to God in prayer. Then once the crisis is averted or passed, they go back to living for themselves.

If we are going to grow in our faith, there will come a time when we realize that it's not really about us at all; it's about God. It's about others. When that happens, God will keep taking care of us, but *our* focus is on God and others. There comes a time when we, as Christians, surrender ourselves completely to Him, stop living for ourselves and fully live for him. That's when we make a commitment to...

selfless grace.

We realize that it's no longer about us; it's about Christ and His Kingdom. In selfish grace we think that the purpose of the Kingdom of God is ourselves. In selfless grace we realize that the purpose of our lives in the Kingdom of God is about giving Him glory and caring for others and their needs—especially those who don't know him yet.

When the Apostle Paul was writing to the believers at the Church in the city of Philippi, he was trying to help them with this very thing—to grow up and change their perspective. This is what He said:

If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care--then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. (Philippians 2:1-5a, tmt)

How did Jesus Christ think of Himself? The Bible says that:

He (Jesus) had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion. (Philippians 2:5b-8, tmt)

In order to be like Jesus, we have to set ourselves apart purely for God and His purposes. It's no longer about us! This is what Paul meant when He said:

“I die every day—I mean that!” (1 Corinthians 15:31)

Paul understood this need to grow up and realize that it was no longer about himself but about God. He put this in drastic terms; saying he had to *put to death* his own desires and wants and needs for the sake of Christ and His Gospel. Living in this selfless grace of God, this “setting ourselves apart” for God is called...

(selfless grace:) sanctification.

To “sanctify” something means to set it apart, so when we talk about sanctification in our relationship with God, it is the act of setting ourselves apart for God. By doing this, we open ourselves up to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Going back to Paul, he was writing to Christians when he said this:

For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (Romans 8:13-14, niv)

Again the Bible says:

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature. . .”
(Colossians 3:5, niv)

Paul practiced what he preached and used his own life as an example of this. He said:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20, niv)

When we settle this issue, our Christian lives begin to grow exponentially, because we are no longer operating in the flesh but in the Spirit. The Bible says that:

“Those who belong to Christ have crucified (or put to death) the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:24-25, niv)

Are you understanding this? What happened at Pentecost in the lives of the disciples can happen for you, too, if you are a believer in Jesus and have come to the point where God’s purposes are more important to you than your own; where your own desires are literally like they are dead to you, and you surrender to God’s purposes and desires instead. It means you live for Jesus, not for yourself. That’s when the Holy Spirit, who has actually been leading you to that point (prevenient grace) can then move in and fill you completely and use you in great power and love for His Kingdom and purpose.

Jesus prayed in John 17 that this would happen for you. He asked God to do this for you:

“Sanctify them by your truth; your word is truth.” (John 17:17, niv)

It’s what the Bible means when it says “May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through . . . (1 Thessalonians 5:23, niv)

Maybe I’m overstating this, but I want to leave no doubt in your mind that if you are a Christian, there is a deeper, Spirit-filled life waiting for you if you are willing to move past selfish grace and start living in selfless grace; it’s called sanctification.

Once we’ve allowed this power over self, we will find that there is new power to do especially two more things. One of those is our second point, and that is...

2. Power to *serve*.

Just like it is impossible for us to love the way Christ does apart from His Spirit living in us, it's impossible for us to serve the way Christ serves unless His Spirit is serving through us. Remember it was Jesus, whose example we follow, who said:

"I did not come to be served, but to serve." (Matthew 20:28)

And we are told to live the same way as Jesus. That kind of selfless serving of others is not something we can do on our own, it takes His Spirit living in us.

The Bible tells us that, now that we have been saved and set free:

"Do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love." (Galatians 5:13, niv)

We are told to:

"Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men."
(Ephesians 6:7, niv)

That's why the Holy Spirit gives us gifts or special abilities, so that with them we can serve others. The Bible says:

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. (1 Peter 4:10, niv)

What is this service? Jesus describes it this way:

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. And here's why: I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was homeless and you gave me a room, I was shivering and you gave me clothes, I was sick and you stopped to visit, I was in prison and you came to me.' "Then those 'sheep' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me--you did it to me.' (Matthew 25:34-40, niv)

This Spirit of service is different than the spirit of the world around us; humanly, it's not our nature to serve (at least not when it becomes inconvenient or sacrificial to do so). We live in a self-service world: Self-service gas stations. Self-service fast food. You can even check yourself out at the grocery store. If anything, the pandemic only made it worse. We have lost the idea of service to others in our society today. We are full-on consumers. Yet Jesus reminded us of the value of service as he humbly washed his disciples' feet. And when he was done with this task he told his disciples:

"Now that I, your teacher and Lord, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet." (John 13:4, niv)

It is the same thing Jesus tells you and me. In another place in the Bible Jesus taught this in a dramatic and unforgettable way. He said:

“Whoever wants to save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for Me and for the gospel will find it.” (Mark 10:45)

If a life is to remain useful, it must be lived in service to others, and it’s the Spirit who enables us to do so.

The last point I want to make is that because of Pentecost, God’s Spirit gives us...

3. Power to *share*.

In Acts 1:8 Jesus specifically said that the disciples would receive *power* when the Holy Spirit filled them, and that power would equip them to share. Share what? Share with others about God’s love in Christ:

“You will tell everyone about me.” (Act 1:8, cev)

This was clearly demonstrated by the fact that, in Acts two that we read at the beginning, the disciples had the power to speak in foreign languages for the express purpose of telling the people about Jesus. The disciples were enabled in the power of the Spirit to tell the crowd who Jesus was and what He had done in their lives through the medium of languages which were completely foreign to them—languages they had never studied. There were people there from sixteen different countries, and all of them immediately heard the Great News about Jesus in their own languages – simultaneously.

But a “translation” wasn’t the only thing going on. Through the Spirit’s power the bashful became bold. Peter, the impetuous and poorly educated fisherman who denied even knowing Jesus in order to save his own hide, had power to become a preacher. On that first day of Pentecost, after Peter preached and the other 119 disciples spoke so boldly, over 3000 people became Christians. What a powerful example of what God’s Spirit wants to do through you and me!

In Acts 4:31 it says that on another time, with other new Christians, that:

“After they had prayed, the meeting place shook. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *bravely spoke God’s message*.” (Act 4:31, cev)

Do you see that? *That* is the result of the Holy Spirit’s filling. Have you experienced that result of the Spirit’s filling in your life?

But it didn’t stop there. In Acts 7 we read about the strong witness of Stephen who was full of the Holy Spirit. Stephen’s bold sharing struck the heart of a young Pharisee named Saul, who became the Spirit filled preacher Paul.

All this describes power to tell others about Jesus, and we too are given the power to share. No one who was in that upper room was left out; they were *all* filled, and they *all* became people who powerfully shared the Good News. God doesn’t want any of

us left out, either, so we can be people who powerfully introduce others to Jesus through the Holy Spirit filling us.

John Piper provides the following helpful illustration of the Holy Spirit before and after Pentecost: Picture a huge dam for hydroelectric power under construction, like the Aswan High Dam on the Nile, 375 feet high and 11,000 feet across. Egypt's President Nasser announced the plan for construction in 1953. The dam was completed in 1970 and in 1971 there was a grand dedication ceremony and the 12 turbines with their ten billion kilowatt-hour capacity were unleashed with enough power to light every city in Egypt. During the long period of construction the Nile River wasn't completely stopped. Even as the reservoir was filling, part of the river was allowed to flow past. The country folk downstream depended on it. They drank it, they washed in it, it watered their crops and turned their mill-wheels. They sailed on it in the moonlight and wrote songs about it. It was their life. But on the day when the reservoir poured through the turbines a power was unleashed that spread far beyond the few folks down river and brought possibilities they had only dreamed of.

Well, Pentecost is like the dedicatory opening of the Aswan High Dam. Before Pentecost the river of God's Spirit blessed the people of Israel and was their very life. But after Pentecost the power of the Spirit spread out to light the whole world. None of the benefits enjoyed in the pre-Pentecostal days were taken away. But ten billion kilowatts were added to enable the church to take the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ to every tongue and tribe and nation.²

And here is something else I want you to consider: like with that story, this power-generating experience is not supposed to be a one-time occurrence. It is to be an ongoing process. When our spiritual power runs low, we need to return to the Source and let the Holy Spirit pour into us and through us again, bringing fresh power. We need to *keep being filled*. This happened to the early followers of Jesus. Peter and John had already been baptized in the Spirit at Pentecost; but later on, when persecution arose, they needed a new surge of spiritual power; so they prayed to the Lord and once again:

"They were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:31)

Do you need to be filled with the Spirit? Or do you need a fresh filling for service and fresh power in your life?

Prayer

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.
(Ephesians 3:20-21)

² John Piper, "Was the Holy Spirit not on Earth before Pentecost," Gospel Coalition Blogs (5-24-15)