

2021 Pentecost Greeting – Without the Holy Spirit, We Would Be Nothing!



Pentecost: On the birthday of the global church, we confess that without the Holy Spirit we would be nothing!

Mission is rooted in the marvelous eternal covenant of election among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who was poured out at Pentecost. God's eternal decree to elect people to salvation—people to whom he applies salvation by the Holy Spirit and for whom salvation has been accomplished by Christ—has its source and foundation in God alone (John 6:37, 44; Ephesians 1:4). Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are joined together in a missionary covenant. The motivation is God's own love, his eternal mercy, and his own glory (Exodus 19:4–5; Hosea 11:1–4; Jeremiah 31:3). For us humans, this remains mysterious, far beyond our understanding, but a proof of the unearned grace he bestows on us. The missionary covenant of God is not only a matter of his covenant people; it also has to do with individuals (Matthew 22:14; John 15:19; Romans 8:29; 9:13–22) whom God has chosen for a particular purpose (Isaiah 43:20–21; 45:4).

Pentecost makes it clear that world mission in the power of the Spirit is the most important mark of Jesus' church. Jesus instructed the disciples repeatedly to wait until the Holy Spirit came before beginning their mission to all people (Mark 16:15–20; Acts 1:4–11). The Holy Spirit was to come in the place of Jesus to convince the world of the gospel (John 16:7–11). When the Holy Spirit fell upon his church, both the New Testament church and world mission began. On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–40), speaking in tongues and the miracle of understanding on the part of hearers from all parts of the Roman Empire made it clear that the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit transcends all language and cultural barriers.

Acts 1:8 clarifies what mission looks like: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Who conducts world mission? Jesus (Matthew 16:18) and the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). It cannot occur without the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit will “convict the world” (John 16:8). The Holy Spirit is the guarantor of mission. If Pentecost had never happened, there would be no world mission. Reference to Pentecost does not mean an individual should overstep proper boundaries and limitations. Rather, Pentecost means God’s Spirit has begun his work of world mission and has brought people into that activity.

Without the Holy Spirit, every form of world mission and every mission strategy are doomed to fail. Only the Holy Spirit can convict people of their sin (John 16:7–10), lead people to the knowledge of God and of the saving work of Jesus, and make them new people in Christ (John 3:5). Even if God enlists Christians for work in world mission and wants them to use their intellect to reach others (consider, for example, Paul’s many detailed travel plans and his general strategy, as described in Romans 1 and 15 or in 1 Corinthians), all such mission strategies are under the caveat of tentativeness, because God alone decides whether they will lead to success (1 Corinthians 12:4–6; Romans 1:13).

May you be filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit this coming Pentecost Sunday!

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