***The Beginning of the Church  
  
Colossians 1:24-29  
  
COL-189***

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2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is inspired by God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

2 Peter 2:1: "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality. And because of them, the way of truth will be maligned. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep."

2 Timothy 1:13-14: "Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you."

Please turn to the treasures this morning of "The Mystery of the Church," segment number 4, in Colossians 1:24-29.

The line of an old popular song says, "I never promised you a rose garden." That is a suitable description of the Christian's proper expectations in God's service. Spiritual warfare, in which we believers are daily engaged, entails the suffering of spiritual combat, not a bed of roses. Our enemy is Satan. His demons, and the people of the evil world system of the devil all conspire to silence the Christian in various ways about the marvels of grace salvation, and the church-age power system, provided first for Christ in His humanity, and now available to us – that power system of the knowledge of Bible doctrine, and temporal fellowship for the Holy Spirit to lead in the use and application of that doctrine of truth.

A person who is in that status at any particular point in time is at the super-grace level of his spiritual life. He has the doctrines of the Word of God, and he has the Holy Spirit to apply them, including the implications. It is one thing to know a biblical truth. It is another thing to know how to extend that to all the implications in the various details of our lives.

We have never been expected to muddle around like a bunch of ninnies in the Christian life. God has provided us by His grace, salvation; and, by His grace, He has provided us with a way of living a godly Christian life. And we can live that without apology. And when we stumble, we have a way of correction, and a way back.

That system is clear in the Scriptures. It is very unclear for most Christians, and amazingly, even for those who understand it – they often choose to turn their backs upon it. We, as Christians, are in an antagonistic climate because we are in the world system that Satan has created. But God has given us a way of victory in the midst of that evil age.

The apostle Paul found that to live a godly life meant to experience suffering. And he did indeed. He suffered because he proclaimed the church-age doctrine of truth to the gentile world. Jews hated him, because Paul said that God had a new people – no longer the Jews. They were temporarily set aside. He has a Jew-and-gentile group called the church. They are his favorite now. And they are being treated with grace, not with rules and regulations anymore. They are being given freedoms that the Jews never enjoyed, and the Jews were so jealous.

Those who were smart believed in Christ. Those who were not, fought the system. And the apostle Paul, because he was the premier proclaimer of grace-age truth, was always under the gun of the hatred of the religious crowd, as well as the political one. The apostle Paul suffered for proclaiming this truth to the gentile world. But he did that because he knew what his spiritual gifts were, and he knew what his mission of service was for God. He had been told: "Here's the truth. Here's what you are to proclaim. And you are My chosen one to make this declaration to the gentile world. Because of it, you will suffer, but I will sustain you. The weaker you get, the greater will be my sustaining hand, and the stronger you will be in your impact upon society.

The apostle Paul, therefore, felt it a great honor to serve God, his Father, in spite of the suffering. Colossians 1:24: "Now I rejoice in my suffering for your sake." He considered it a great honor to serve, and he refused to be dissuaded from serving Christ, or to be silenced by suffering from Satan and his world system. Christians are all too-ready today to substitute some world activity for a Christian service activity. There are many things that parents should be teaching their children. But I would suggest to you that one of the foremost things you ought to teach them, once they are saved, that should be drilled into their minds from their earliest childhood, so that perhaps it will take root, and they will grow up into something significant, instead of just another clod who is walking around on the face of the earth, is Matthew 6:33. No greater instruction has ever passed from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ than this verse: "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you."

The context talks about all kinds of things in life that people have; that people want; and, that people need. And Jesus says, "That's all well and good. But that is not the focus." In Matthew 6:34, He says, "Therefore, do not be anxious for tomorrow. For tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." And there is the doctrinal principle of living one day at a time. You don't have to see the future clearly. You don't have to be sure that you have all of your future security provided for you. You have to only know for this day, and for the logistical grace that God will give you to be able to function this day.

However, it all comes down to verse 33: "Seek first His kingdom." Do you understand what that means? It means that my mission and my calling, with my spiritual gifts, as was the case with the apostle Paul – that comes number one in life. There are all kinds of things I would like to do, but number one is the reason I'm taking my next breath; the reason I'm still alive; and, the reason I still have capacity to serve. And only you and God can determine what your abilities are; what your resources are; and, what your status of life enables you to do. Seek the mission first, and along with it, the godly life; obedience; and, the principles of doctrine.

You look upon the world, and you pity it. You do not envy it. You do not get out there with the world. You do not get out there with the lowlife. You do not get up there with the Hollywood glamor, and all of the exciting things that they have, and are able to do, and have any envy for them, or any desire for them. You have nothing but pity – sad human beings who are going out into a burning hell in eternity.

What do they have to teach us over against the Lord Jesus? You seek God's righteousness – that standard which is set out for us of moral conduct within the Word of God. Then all the things you need in life are going to be added to you.

Teach that to your children, and you won't make the mistake of what I see happening all the time. It just astounds me. I can never get used to it. I see Christian parents all around me. Their children are in responsibilities of church activities. Something else comes along in the world system of their life. They don't even have to think twice what they do. I'll go with the world. I'll always go with the world. I'll always go with something of world activity. Does that mean I have to be absent from some duty at church? Yes, but the world – you go there first. No, Jesus says, "First the kingdom of God." And you may be in some activity that suddenly comes along and says, "I want the Sabbath day." The Sabbath day was originally God's day of creation. It was His special day, and it was His day that He gave us eternally. He gave it as especially to the Jewish people, but it's still our special rest day that He has given to us eternally, to commemorate His great creative work. It belongs to God.

That was made very clear to the Jew. For him, it was the death penalty not to keep that day special for God. So, here's the service of God on Saturday. Something else comes along in the world that wants to call your attention, and you go with it. Do you not know that you will answer for that? Then Sunday comes along. It's the day of great freedom. It is now the Lord's Day. It is the special day of the Lord Jesus Christ, commemorating His resurrection, and it is His day. All these other things of the world come along and say, "Let's do this." But if I do, I can't go to the evening service. If I do, I can't be there for what I'm supposed to do on the Lord's Day: "That's OK. The world goes first. Don't you understand that?" Seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.

If the apostle Paul did not believe that, he could have never made a statement like: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake," because when you serve God first, there is a price to pay. All the things I think of that I would like to do – I don't have time to do them. All the things that I have the ability and the freedom to do – I to set them aside, because if I did them, I couldn't be here on the Sabbath day for the activities. I have to be here for the Lord's Day, for the activities. I have to be there during the week – the activities that I have to be engaged in that are my mission and calling for God.

I'm no different than the rest of you. Don't ever make the Roman Catholic mistake of thinking that we have clergy up here, and laity out here. We don't have any such thing. There's no such thing in the Bible. We are all the priests of God. And you are all on that equal footing in exercising your own priesthood. Now, can you go ahead and say, "I don't like that verse? I don't want to do the things of God first." Yes, you can: "I don't want to teach my children that they must do the things of God first. They'll miss so much fun. Yes, you can teach them, and they'll learn it, and they'll learn it well. And they'll bring grief to your heart, and loss their eternity. But you are free to do that.

However, the course of wisdom says, "The world has nothing to offer. It's all short term. It's all a will-of-the-wisp. It's smoke and mirrors." That's what the world is. It's plain smoke and mirrors. It's deceiving you that here's something you can't live without, and something that's going to enhance your life. It's not going to do any such thing.

The apostle Paul said, "Christians, don't be so ready to substitute something of the world's activity for a moment of being able to walk with Christ in His service." That's what your children should learn. And will the world pity them? Oh yeah, the world will pity them: "Oh, those poor kids. They can't do these things. . . . They're always involved in these religious things. But it is amazing to me to see how many young people have had this drilled into them – that if they come up against a choice between something that requires their presence for God's work, and some activity in the world, they automatically go to the world. That, for some reason, seems to be superior value to parents, and they learn the lesson.

Suffering for introducing lost sinners to Jesus Christ for grace salvation, and for super grace spiritual maturity, which is available for those who are saved, was received by Paul with great joy. The suffering never caused him to pity himself. The suffering never caused him to resent it. Yes, as a Christian, there are things I sure would like to be free to do, but I'm not going to sit around with self-pity, and I'm not going to it – the fact that almighty God has not opened the door for me to have the freedom. I'm not going to turn my back on Him, and play ball with Satan. Paul's eyes were on the Lord Jesus, and with things of eternity, so that he was never bogged down, as are so many carnal Christians, with a life of getting all they can, and canning all they get, for their short, little, puny stay on earth. And that's the course of most Christians lives– getting all you can, and then canning all you get, and sitting there, grasping it with your greedy little hands, not to let it escape from you, because this is what you have worked all your life for, and it filters right through your fingers.

I love that second chapter of Haggai, as he talks about people fixing up their nice panel houses, and all the stuff is filtering through their fingers, with holes in their pockets, knocking themselves out working. They stuff their pockets, and they reach in, and there's nothing there. Haggai says, "God has cut a little hole in your pocket, and He's sucking it off as fast as you put it in there, because your orientation is not right to the Word of God. I love Haggai 2.

The psalmist had it right in Psalms 39:5: "Behold, You have made my days as a handbreadth, and my lifetime as nothing in Your site. Surely every man, at His best is a mere breath." You need to begin to grasp the idea that you're going to live forever, in heaven or hell. You will transfer your residence, but you will live forever. Forever is longer than billions and billions and billions of years – forever. So, what is life here but a handbreadth – the next breath you take? You are immortal, as long as God says, "I have a mission, and I think you can perform it. You can be positive, and you can execute it. You're out of sync now. But I'm going to try to bring you back in. I'm going to keep informing you. I'm going to keep getting doctrine to you. I'm going to keep alerting you, until you cross the point of no return. And at the point of no return, when suddenly God says, "OK, it's clear now that there's no further capacity (possibility) for you to carry out your mission." You will go to sleep and wake up dead – just like that. And you'll be out of here. But as long as there is hope, and as long as there is purpose, and as long as there is opportunity for you to get Matthew 6:33 straight – the mission comes first, you will take another breath.

Psalms 144:4 also says it very nicely: "Man is like a mere breath. His days are like a passing shadow." Then the prophet Isaiah, in Isaiah 40, has that very famous verse which was quoted in the New Testament. Peter quotes this in 1 Peter – Isaiah 40:6-8: "The voice says, 'Call out.' Then he answered, 'What shall I call out?' All flesh is grass. And all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, and the flower fades. Then the breath of the Lord blows upon it. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, and the flower fades. But the Word of our God stands forever."

So, who may you believe? Satan's confused institutions of our world – his system of society that he's put together? Or will you believe, Matthew 6:33? You will make your choice. When you go with the Word of God, which lasts forever, or will you go with that human viewpoint disorientation that all the people you know are struggling through, and mulling around into their self-destruction.

The apostle Paul as a true soldier of Jesus Christ. So, suffering in the service of the King was gladly borne by him. His eye was on the potential honor in heaven of the crown of joy. That great crown of joy is one of the special crowns of honors that are given to certain Christians. The crown of joy is associated with Christian service – divine good production. And the Christian whose life, day-by-day, is focused upon divine good production – not of all the human production of the sin nature, but the production that the Holy Spirit brings through us – that Christian will someday be given the crown of joy. It will be recognition for a life of maximum divine-good production.

What does that mean? It means that a life with the mission came first. Tough, easy, or whatever it was, suffering or not, the mission came first. How many times does the good soldier in the field know; "No, I don't feel like doing this." But he gets up; straps it on; and, he gets up and does what has to be done. Why should we, who serve the King, the Captain of our universe, and the Redeemer of our souls, have anything less to say to Him than to strap it on, and do the job?

Sometimes it's downright embarrassing, if you think about it, to observe how enslaved some Christians are to their possessions and to this world system – how enslaved they are to living a self-centered, indulgent, comfortable life, while believers on the battle line, right across the field, right in their eyesight, are suffering. They do without, and yet they bless others all around them. It is because we don't remember that now is the day that needs to be the day of service – not sometime in the future. And we comfort ourselves with what we will do in the future.

The apostle Paul found this in Corinth. So, in 2 Corinthians 6:1-10, he met this head-on. He said, "Just a minute, people. You are playing a very foolish and dangerous game. You are not going to be here very long. Your life is a breath. It's a flower in a field that burns up overnight. 2 Corinthians 6:1: "Working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain (for no purpose). For He says, 'At the acceptable time I listen to you. And on the day of salvation, I helped you. Behold, now is the acceptable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation.'"

There was an acceptable time when you, in your desperation (your lost condition), cried out to God, and He listened to you. And on the day of salvation, He came through. He made all the provision for your salvation, and He helped you, and He brought you into the body of Christ. Now, for you, today is the acceptable time. Today is the day of salvation. It's no longer something in the future. It is a fact that has been accomplished. So, live in the presence of the fact that you are a saved child of the King: "Giving no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited." Now you are a part of the family of Christ, of the church body, and you are to live in a way that does not discredit the other believers, and does not make them ashamed of you, for your incapacity and service, and for your lack of devotion to duty, and thus doesn't embarrass them as they watch you trivialize your life, when so many important things need to be done. When you are teaching your children to go for the world every time, if the work of God interferes with that.

Verse 4: "But in everything, commending ourselves as the servants of God in much endurance in afflictions; in hardships; in distresses; in beatings; in imprisonments; in tumults; in labors; in sleeplessness; and, in hunger." Does that sound like the good life to you? "In purity; in knowledge; in patience; in kindness; in the Holy Spirit; in genuine love; in the Word of Truth; in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness; for the right hand and the left; by glory and dishonor; by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, yet well-known; as dying, yet, behold, we live; as punished, yet not put to death; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things."

Now, that, folks, is the Christian life at its finest moment. The apostle Paul knew it, and because of that he could say, "The suffering is nothing. It's a short, passing thing. And my eternal glory is going to be beyond my fondest dreams." So, he was very ready and very pleased to fulfill his calling and to perform his duty for the people of God, and to take the suffering in stride.

Then, in Colossians 1:24, he goes on and becomes very more specific about this. He says, "This suffering is in a very specific location. It is in my flesh (my 'sarx')." Here's the Greek word. This refers to the apostle Paul's flesh. It refers to his physical body. The apostle Paul is pointing out Christian service requires the use of one's body. And it requires, therefore, the use of one's body to be at certain places. This is one of the reasons Christians cut out of teaching Sunday school. This is one reason Christians cut out of being youth club leaders. This is one reason they cut out of being in the band, or in the choir, or in some activity. Every week, the body has to be at a certain place. And when that time comes, the body has to be there, in order to perform that service. And they want the body to be somewhere else. They're not going to evaporate. It's going to be someplace else. And they say, "I don't want to be there, in God's service. I want it to be out here in the world's activity. That's what I prefer to do."

So, the apostle Paul said, "I want you to know that it's because my body was in all these places, such that the people who hated the Word of God didn't like to see me, and that they imposed that suffering upon me. Now, yes, it was physical," and he bore the marks of that on his body – that kind of treatment, and abuse, and persecution. But for most of us, it's going to be up here in the head. That's the part of the body that's going to bear the stress. That's the part of the body that is going to get the attack. That's the part of the body that you're going to get to discourage you, and to cause you to be blue, and to cause you to want to look around and say, "Do I want to keep doing this?" There is where the attack is going to come.

It is true that, as time goes by – and the younger you are, the sooner you should recognize this. The body becomes aged, and it begins slipping downhill. And as time goes by, there are fewer things you can do. No sorrow is so great as to look back from the point of physical incapacity, where one can no longer do something, because the body will not function there – where there was a time when you could have done it, and you didn't, because you were out here in the world. There's where your body was. And now you're older; you're wiser; and, you have a better perspective. And you say, "Oh, how I wish I could go there.

I spoke to one of our dying members years ago, and one of the things was an activity that this person was never really involved in, because he had other things that were very attractive to him. And it was so hard for me to look at him and say, "Oh, how I wish I could do that," and he named this activity here at the church. He knew, and I knew, that he was never going to have a chance to do it, but he had a lot of good, powerful years when he could have done it.

The apostle Paul said, "My body was on the line of spiritual service. I wasn't standing in the reserves. I wasn't behind the action, where it's safer. I was there because I'm on the line." And many times, Paul could say, "I was the point man. I was first in line. And the point man is always in the most dangerous place of all. His body is under the most dangerous threat of all, because when the enemy hits, the point man gets the first shot.

So, the apostle Paul says, "Time slows down. I'm getting older. But God enables me to bounce back. Satan buffets me, but I'm not incapacitated." The believer's body is under suffering, because Satan wants to dissuade us from doing the will of God. That is our point of contact with the world – our body. That is how we convey the Word of God. That is the place that we speak to people. That is the place that we are oriented as human beings to human being.

Every Christian at every age level must determine before God how much of his body should be involved in the institutions and activities of Satan's world, in contrast to the active activities of God's work. And that's why Matthew 6:33 is so important for you to teach your children, if you want them to grow up knowing that Christ gets first choice, and that they recognize people who are evil, and they recognize people of the world system who might be nice and attractive and personable, but they are losers. Their breath life is going to be gone quickly, and it's going to be burning in the lake of fire. Whereas those who are devoted to the calling of God, they will be the winners, even though we may suffer physically in the process.

It is sad to see Christians, as I do so often, who choose the good in place of the best. Some of these activities of the world are not evil or bad. It's a question of their place, and they're the good that is substituted for the best. And the surprise is going to come at the Judgment Seat of Christ: You will say, "But Lord, I thought I was doing good." And He will say, "Well, you were, but I wanted you to do the best. And you substituted the good for the best. That's the difference.

"I now rejoice in my sufferings for your sakes, and in my body. In my body, I do my share, on behalf of His body." The apostle Paul says, "In my physical body, I do my share of service and suffering in behalf of His body." What is that? The physical body of Jesus Christ? No: "Which is the church." He says, "I do this in behalf of this wonderful new species of human beings begun on the day of Pentecost, and will end on the day of the rapture – the body of Christ, of Jew and gentile. That is the special group called out to be the bride of Christ someday – the body of Jesus Christ.

There are a few things to refresh our minds on the church. There are whole denominations today, which came down from the Reformation, that have this as balled up today as it was in the Reformation. Some of these reformers, who got so much straightened up, continued the Roman Catholic doctrine that the church is a substitute for Israel. One term for this is Reform Theology. And to this day, they think that the church is now the new Israel. And they talk about Sunday as the Sabbath day. And everything gets balled up and twisted up. Suddenly, there are no eternal promises to Abraham, or to David, and certainly nonsense spoken to Mary, when the angel said to her, "You're going to have this Son, and He's going to fulfill Israel's destiny, and He will sit on his father David's throne, and He'll rule over the house of Jacob forever." His father David's throne is the millennial kingdom, the house of Jacob, or the Jewish people. Anybody with half-a-brain knows what those words mean, but not to the people who got it all balled up in the Reformation, and insist on believing that they're good men who led them out of Catholicism, but didn't lead them far enough. This is no small thing.

There are two things that God revealed to the apostle Paul, where he was the number one recipient. One was free grace salvation – an absolute gift of God. And He revealed it as it had never been known and understood before. The second thing, second only in importance to that doctrine of grace salvation, was His doctrine of the church. And most of your relatives who are out there struggling and mulling around in a Christian life that has no reality, and who are uselessly running off their days on a treadmill are at fault because they don't understand the doctrine of the church.

**The Church**

The word "church" in the Greek is "ekklesia." It means literally "the called out ones." And, as such, it refers to an assembly of people. The word "church" was given a special technical meaning in the New Testament by the Holy Spirit to identify a group of believers who were revealed in the New Testament, in contrast to Israel of the Old Testament revelation. The church of the New Testament is always in contrast to Judaism of Israel in the Old Testament. There is no connection between them. They are just two different groups of God's people. And they are always in contrast to one another. Judaism and the Jews have a way of life under the Mosaic Law. Christians, under the age of grace, and the doctrines of the church age, have a different way of life – totally different. You can't squeeze them together. And that's what these people of the Reform Theology orientation, and failure to understand this difference, are constantly trying to do, so it's downright silly.

There was a time when those people said Israel will never exist as a nation again. Oh boy, did May 14th, 1948 ever blow them out of the water? They stood there looking at one another, dumbfounded: "This cannot be. The Jew can never exist as a nation. We know that. Our reformer's told us that. The church is the new Israel. How can that nation exist? This this cannot be, because it sounds like the angel was right, and that Jesus would reign over the house of Jacob forever.

Point number three: In Matthew 16:18, upon the rejection of Jesus as Israel's Messiah by Israel, He announced the divine plan to form a new distinct body of believers. He presented this in five explanatory words. In Matthew's 16:18, while crossing out of Israel into gentile territory, in Ceasarea Philippi, Jesus said, "And I also say to you," speaking to Peter, "that you are Peter. And upon this rock." And here you have to have the Greek language to give you information. In the Greek, it says, "Unto you, I say that you are Peter.” His name was Peter. But the Greek word that his name came from means "pebble:" And upon this rock." And that is a totally different Greek word means an enormous boulder (a huge structure). The Lord is playing on two words: "Peter, you're a pebble. But there is a rock." And this demonstrative pronoun points back to what Peter has just said. Jesus said to Peter, "Who say you that I am?" In verse 16, Peter replies: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." . . .

Verse 17: "Blessed are you, Simon Barjonah, because flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father, Who is in heaven. He has made this clear to you, Peter. Consider yourself fortunate. You didn't figure this out. God broke through with the Holy Spirit," and suddenly he realized, "This is Jesus, the promised Messiah." And Jesus says, "Now, Peter (and men, listen carefully): Our man Peter here is a little pebble, but he has just declared a truth (a doctrine) that is a rock upon which I will build My church:" "I will fill My church." These are the five great words: "And the gates of hell will not overpower it.

This sentence says, "I" – Jesus Christ is the one Who builds the church. He picked you to be part of it. "Will" – it didn't exist then. It was future. The Reform Theology says, "It began in the Old Testament." No, it wasn't in there." Jesus said, "This is future. I'm going to do this in the future. "Build" – it's going to be one rock upon another, and one stone upon another put into this building – building this temple of the body of Christ: "One person at a time will be brought in, and I'm building this structure. "My" – it belongs to Christ. It's His personal body. And it's also going to be His bride, in the future, for all eternity – "My church; My assembly of special believers; and, My new species of human beings. What a significant sentence: "I will build My church."

The apostles listened. They thought. They considered this. It was a thrilling thought. They got just the barest understanding of this, but they did not have the intensity and the depth of what Christ had just said to them – the significance of building upon the foundation of Christ, a whole body of believers that are going to be related to Him, with special privileges, and special blessings, and special authority, that they would never have dreamed of in the Old Testament. But they didn't understand what was all involved.

It wasn't until, after three years in the Arabian Desert, that Paul (Saul, the persecutor) was changed into Paul the missionary, and the great expositor of doctrinal truth came along – after all this sentence had been explained to Paul in detail. Then he came, and started writing those New Testament letters, those epistles, and the doctrinal joy just poured out of him, of what God had for the believer of this age.

In Matthew 16:18, Christ had been officially now rejected. So He symbolically crossed out of the territory of Israel to indicate that he was now going to turn aside from the Jew. They were going to be put on hold in their program. He wasn't rejecting them. And He was turning to a new group of people in the church that He would form. And these five explanatory words put it all in focus.

It's very important that you understand this distinction, so that no man will ever be able to rob you of your freedoms in Christ, and of the power system of doctrine plus the Holy Spirit, to a Christian in temporal fellowship. That's the only way your kids are going to make it. It's the only way you're going to make it. Some of you will say, "No." Some of your kids will go negative. But those who go positive will rise to the top of the tree, just as Jesus did, in His humanity.

Point number four: this body of believers begin on the day of Pentecost with the new ministry of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit – they had been prepared for this. They didn't really fully understand this. Such a thing had never happened in Judaism, because Judaism and Christianity were two different things. *Israel and the church are two different things.* They had never had the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And they weren't quite clear what that meant.

It happened on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-4: "And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place." People from all over the Roman Empire, Jews had come to Pentecost for this celebration. That's why all these different languages were there that day: "And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind (the Holy Spirit coming). And it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues of fire distributing themselves. And they rested on each one of them (symbols of the holiness of God's presence). And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages, as a spirit gave them utterance."

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Some of you may be thinking, "Ah, but you just said, 'They were baptized.'" Yes, because what happened on Pentecost was fully clarified for us in Acts 11. Two things happened to them. In Acts 11:15-16, Peter has been sent to Joppa. Seven years have passed since the day of Pentecost. He is now told that we are now going to turn from Jew. It had to be the Jew first. They had had the first opportunity to come into church. Now we are going to turn to the gentile world, and we are going to start bringing gentiles into the church. They will come in, in such droves, that they will overwhelm us. So, the church will become basically a gentile structure. And Peter explains to them this whole principle of being saved.

He had to be pushed to it with that vision where he was told to eat unclean animals. He had said, "Lord, I can't do that." God says, "Don't tell me what you can't do if I tell you to do it." And Peter got the message. The unclean gentiles were now to be treated as potential members of the body of Christ, the church. So, in Acts 11:15, it says, "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as He did upon us at the beginning (on the day of Pentecost). And I remembered the Word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" Peter said, "And I remember those Words of the Lord: 'John baptized with water, but you are going to be baptized the Holy Spirit.' And we were baptized on the day of Pentecost." That's the connection. He said, "I'm seeing these people (these gentiles) being baptized by the Holy Spirit." Being baptized into what? Baptism always means you're associated with something, or you're introduced into something: "Baptized into Christ." And suddenly, gentiles are being baptized.

**The Baptism of the Holy Spirit**

So, we know that on the day of Pentecost, what they experienced was the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which formed the first body of the church – the first group of believers molded together into the body of Christ. They were also filled, on the day of Pentecost, with the Holy Spirit, which means that they were totally under control of the Holy Spirit. Every Christian is baptized, at the point of salvation, into Christ. That can only happen once. The charismatics are running around all the time, calling on people to look for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. That is one of those subtle nonsenses of Satan that is imposed upon those poor people. But every one of us is repeatedly filled. Every time you go to the Lord and said, "Father, this is what I did. I gritted my teeth. You were tugging at my heart to say "No," or to just say "Yes." And I disobeyed you. I admit it, and I confess it. Immediately, 1 John 1:9 tells us the Holy Spirit puts you right back in fellowship of God the Father. And what has happened to you? You've been filled with the Spirit.

One man, one time in our congregation, said, "I'm driving along in my car, and I had something between me and God, and I said, "I have to get this straight. And while I'm driving there, I confessed it to Him." And he said, "I almost the impact of the Holy Spirit as I felt filled with the Spirit. Well, he didn't feel filled with the Spirit. What he had was a sense of joy and relief because he was now filled. Every time you confess, and you get back in that inner circle of fellowship, you are once more filled with the Spirit. That's what it means to be a spiritual Christian – not what you do, but what you are. We have enough fakers going around doing things that make us think that they're really spiritual Christians. It's what you are. And only the Holy Spirit can make you that.

So, with these two verses, we know what happened on Pentecost. Now, that was the start of it all. From then, this wonderful body of Christ now enters into relationships with God that were unheard of, and unthinkable, before that point in human history. And, lo and behold, they are true of us today, and they are coming to a climax today. That's what the sorry thing is about Christians who are fiddling and wasting away their lives out in the world. They are waiting for something in the future when some great thing will give them an opportunity to do something. Don't do that. We are in the intensified stage of the angelic conflict. All hell is in a rage, and breaking loose, because Christ is on the horizon. And we don't have that many years left.

However, like Jesus said, "Do business until I come. Occupy, till I come," the King James translation says. As Jesus said, "I must be about My Father's business." There is more to be said, which we will look at next time, about this wonderful group. But whose business would you be occupied with this week?

Father, we want to thank You for this, Your Word.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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