

Jews and 'Fruity' Pentecostals

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I passed a cemetery the other morning. There in the drizzling rain stood three men next to a backhoe and a pile of dirt. I glanced their way for a few seconds before my light turned, thinking about the one for whom they had prepared the ground. What had that person's life been like? How did he or she leave their 'mark' on the world? Of course I could not discern on the faces of the workmen even a hint about this stranger's life. Such things are knowable only by personal interaction and observation. We study signs to know a person.

As I continued north, I meditated on this idea of signs. What are the 'signs' of my life? What indication do people around me have of the kind of person I am? What will friends, family and acquaintances say of me when they learn of my passing? In my short appearance on stage, how will the critics rate my performance?

Going further with this train of thought I began wondering about the Church. Beyond the scrutiny of my own life,

what will critics, casual observers and seekers say about the body of Christ of which I am a part? I began to be concerned about that critique twenty years ago when I first learned the sad history of Christian anti-Semitism. Though I was a pastor's daughter and attended Bible College, I had not known this unfortunate reality until taking a Jewish-Christian

Relations course in my last undergraduate semester. That course sensitized me to the beauty of my Jewish spiritual heritage, but also brought me great pain. I was ashamed as I discovered what those who called themselves "Christian" had done to Jewish people (in the name of Christ) over the past two millennia. Surely, I reasoned, those people weren't *real* Christians.

Whether they were *real* or not, however, is up to God, but the fact is, they were *seen* as Christians by the Jewish victims of bad Christian theology and behavior. From Justin Martyr's replacement theology¹ to the devastation of the Crusades, the horrors of the Spanish Inquisition, merciless

Scripture tells us Jews seek a sign. Pentecostals are the "signs and wonders" people! Given the sad history of Jewish-Christian relations, Pentecostals must remember that one of the greatest 'signs' we can show the as-yet-unredeemed Jewish world is to walk in the fruit of the Holy Spirit, making the most of every opportunity to regain our credibility with our Jewish neighbors by truly being loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled.

expulsions of Jews from Christian countries, Luther's "complete plan for dealing with the Jews," the emergence of Hitler's "positive Christianity," and even the modern day economic divestment of Israel by mainline churches, the sad truth is that 2,000 years of Christian 'signs' have indicated mostly rotten fruit as far as the Jews are concerned.

As inheritors of this shameful legacy, and as believers faced with how we will respond to the "new" anti-Semitism raising its ugly head in our day, how can Pentecostals truly live before Jews as the "people of the Spirit?" The answer is simple, but not easy. If Jews are ever to behold the sign they seek,² Pentecostals must walk in the *fruit* of the Spirit—the *Holy Spirit*. He is the only one who can help us *live* holy in this world. In Jesus' day, many of His fellow Jews sought miraculous signs from Him. And in the Early Church, the apostles and believers went about performing miraculous signs. As a result, thousands of Jewish people came to faith in their Messiah.

Surely as Pentecostals we must pray for the Spirit to work signs and wonders in and through our lives that will be a "sign" to Jewish people of the reality of God's salvation available in Jesus, but miraculous signs must be accompanied by the 'everyday' signs of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.³ If miraculous signs are performed, but the Church acts unloving, depressed, anxious, impatient, mean, bad, faithless, cruel or out of control toward the Jewish people, news of the miraculous signs will fall on deaf ears.

I grieve such lost opportunities, both in our day and throughout Church history.

Take the Reformation, for instance. In a time when some individuals were paying with their lives to gain increased tolerance from Rome for their new ideas, the diffusion of Reformation ideals was often accomplished at the *expense* of the Jewish people. Balthasar Hubmaier (1485-1528), the first professional theologian among the Anabaptists and pastor in the Regensburg Cathedral, in his apocalyptic zeal and sense of calling as a prophet of God to expose Jews as a 'plague' upon his city, preached a fiery sermon against the 'idle, lecherous, and greedy' Jews of Regensburg, instigating the people of his congregation and city to rise up against them. On January 2, 1519, the Jews were expelled, their synagogue leveled, and a chapel constructed on its rubble. A person simply has to ask, how might a Christian exercise of the fruit of the Spirit have come in handy for Jews on a day like that?

And how ironic that when the "ruler of German Jewry," Josel of Rosheim, rose to address a Protestant audience to defend his community against its impending expulsion in 1537, he used the Scriptures as his weapon of choice. Knowing the value scholars of the Reformation period placed on the sources, Josel argued with some success⁴ from the Bible that restrictions and persecutions against the Jews should not be carried out (because, after all, Jews, too were made in God's image). Oh that it had been a Christian Reformer advocating kindness toward the Jewish community on the basis of Scripture! Surely any follower of Messiah, full of the Spirit of God and aware of the Scripture, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord,"⁵ would plead the

case of the Jews in such a manner. But Christian history took a different route than that. How often have Jews experienced Christians as *peaceful* neighbors? Too infrequently have these sons and daughters of Abraham experienced the benefits of Christians living *holy* lives, through the enablement of the *Holy* Spirit.

Where good fruit is seen, where believers live in the ‘light of the Lord,’ the fruit that becomes evident consists ‘in all goodness, righteousness and truth,’ (Eph. 5:8) and Jewish people are presented with a spiritual reality, which draws them to faith in their Messiah. There are thousands of Jewish believers in the U.S. and Israel who came to faith because some believer discovered what it meant to please the Lord, be very careful and wise in the way they live, and through the Spirit make the most of every opportunity (Eph. 5:10, 15-18). Those believers bore *good fruit* to the Jewish world, gaining a listening ear because they lived a life characterized by the *fruit* of the *Holy* Spirit.

There are many Christians in our day, however, who believe the Church has forever lost the right to that listening ear. According to Holocaust scholars Eva Fleischner⁶ and Franklin Littell,⁷ the Church has lost its credibility with the Jewish people in light of Christian anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Because of Christian perpetrators, collaborators, and bystanders, the Church has lost its voice—its right to speak to Jews about Yeshua their Messiah.

So how can the Church find its voice? How can it gain the trust of the Jewish world? What can restore Christian

credibility? Only the work of the Holy Spirit, through the operation of the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of believers can accomplish this vision.

I think of the twinkle in the eye of my 93-year-old Jewish friend Hannah as we sit and talk or walk arm in arm through her assisted living facility. She tells me about what life was like in Germany in the years 1933-1937, before she and her brother were able to escape to America. She grieves the loss of her other brother who was unable to leave because of health reasons and was eventually deported in a sealed cattle car. She listens as I talk with her about the class I teach on the Holocaust and the work I did, transcribing tapes of over 500 interviews with Holocaust survivors. Raised “very Reform,” as she puts it, she asks me questions about the Bible, admitting inadequate knowledge of her heritage.

She tells me about her current infirmities and ailments. I pray with her for healing. We talk about Paul’s Ephesians 2 vision of the “one new man” (Jew and Gentile believers knitted together in the Messiah), and how tragic the course of Christian-Jewish history has been.

She talks. I listen. I talk. She listens. We eat together. We laugh. I leave, sorrowful at her insistence that one is “either” a Jew “or” a Christian, not both. But she invites me back. And I pray for her, that as she experiences the fruit of the Spirit—through the enablement of the Spirit—in my life, she will see the sign she seeks, different from what her parents and grandparents saw from their Christian neighbors, and will ultimately find fulfillment in Yeshua her Messiah.⁸

¹The idea that the Church is the “new” or “true” Israel, which has *replaced* and superseded the Jews as God’s chosen people. All the covenants and blessings of the Old Testament no longer apply to the people of Israel but to the Church. In place of being a people through whom God will fulfill His covenant with Abraham, Jews are now subject to all the curses of scripture because of their rejection of Jesus.

²I Cor. 1:22, “Jews require a sign...”

³Gal. 5:22.

⁴While the expulsion from Saxony was not rescinded, the expulsion from Brandenburg was withdrawn. H. H. Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 652.

⁵Heb. 12:14.

⁶Eva Fleischner, “The Crucial Importance of the Holocaust For Christians,” in *The Holocaust: Readings and Interpretations*. Joseph R. Mitchell & Helen Buss Mitchell, (Dubuque, Iowa: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2001), 436.

⁷Franklin Littell, “Inventing the Holocaust: A Christian Perspective,” in *The Holocaust: Readings and Interpretations*. Joseph R. Mitchell & Helen Buss Mitchell, (Dubuque, Iowa: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2001), 443.

⁸3/5/05: *Hannah accepted Yeshua as her Messiah three days ago, seven hours before He welcomed her home.*