

## The Baptism of the Spirit and Pentecostal Soteriology

It is through the indwelling presence of the Spirit that one is identified as a member of the Church as the universal body of Christ. This brings up our next general topic, the nature of Spirit baptism.

### Baptism in the Spirit

The New Testament mentions Spirit baptism in several places:

Matthew 3:11—"As for me [John], I baptize you in water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not even fit to remove His sandals; He Himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

Mark 1:8—"I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Luke 3:16—"John answered and said to them all, 'As for me, I baptize you with water; but He who is mightier than I is coming, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He Himself will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire.'"

John 1:33—"And I [John] did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.'"

Acts 1:5—"For John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Acts 11:16—"I [Peter] remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'"

1 Corinthians 12:13—"For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

### Initial Observations

#### **1. The verses seem to describe the same experience.**

Pentecostals historically have isolated 1 Corinthians 12:13, arguing that it speaks of an action "by the Spirit" while the other passages speak of an action performed by Jesus. Since the same Greek phrase is used in each of these verses, it would be a mistake to treat any of them in isolation from the others. It is better to say that in every case the Spirit is the element in which persons are baptized but that Jesus remains the one performing the action.<sup>2</sup>

#### **2. The verses compare Spirit baptism to John's baptism.**

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<sup>1</sup>The NASB reads "by" one Spirit, but the more literal "in" is used here to demonstrate the balance between this and the other passages cited.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 766-67.

In most cases, the baptism in the Spirit is contrasted to John's baptism in water. John baptized persons by placing them in water. Following the parallelism, the suggestion is that Jesus will baptize persons by placing them "in the Spirit."

### **3. Two of the passages also speak of a baptism in fire.**

Matthew 3 and Luke 3 both speak of Jesus' baptism "in the Spirit and in fire." This should not be related to the "tongues of fire" in Acts 2. Judging by the context, the "fire" here is the fire of judgment (Matt. 3:12; Luke 3:17).<sup>3</sup> Since baptism "in the Spirit" is so clearly a Christian experience in the other passages, the reference to fire here presents a sharp contrast: Jesus will baptize believers in the Spirit, but unbelievers will be baptized in fire. The fact that baptism means "immersion" is perhaps appropriate here.

### **4. 1 Corinthians 12:13 adds something that the other verses lack.**

According to this verse, believers have all been "baptized into one body." The context of the chapter demonstrates quite clearly that this "body" is the Church, the body of Christ. Two other Pauline passages speak of being "baptized into Christ," but with no mention of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 6:1-4; Gal. 3:27).

## **The Nature and Meaning of Spirit Baptism**

### **1. Relationship to Indwelling**

When Spirit baptism is mentioned in the gospels and in Acts 1, it is prospective. Jesus and John are referring to something that will be experienced in the future. Carson observes, "In a time when many Jews felt the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn till the Messianic Age, this announcement could only have been greeted with excited anticipation."<sup>4</sup> By the time of the Ascension, the time is obviously quite near. Jesus said that they would be baptized in the Spirit "not many days from now." This is evidently a reference to the day of Pentecost, when the believers "were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4). The account of that day does not mention baptism in the Spirit, but this is clearly the fulfillment of Jesus' promise. The experience was repeated with Gentiles in Acts 10:44-48, and Peter interpreted that event by saying that "the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as upon us at the beginning" (Acts 11:15). He then said that this caused him to remember the Lord's promise, "How He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit'" (v. 16). The promise of Spirit baptism is fulfilled through the Spirit's indwelling!!

Spirit baptism cannot be separated from the Spirit's indwelling, as if the two were separate works. Like regeneration, Spirit baptism is accomplished through His indwelling. This is significant, for it means that Spirit baptism is not a post-conversion event, as Pentecostals maintain. It also emphasizes the unitary nature of the Spirit's work. He comes to indwell believers at the moment of conversion (Rom. 8:9; Gal. 3:1-3), and that single act has many effects.

### **2. Identification with the Body of Christ**

According to 1 Corinthians 12:13, believers have all been baptized in the Spirit into the body of Christ. The presence of the indwelling Spirit incorporates individuals into the Church as members of Christ and of one another.

Spirit baptism has been viewed as a distinctive New Testament work through which the Church, as a distinctively New Testament entity, is constituted. Walvoord writes, "The work of the Holy Spirit in baptism . . . is the one work of the Holy Spirit which is found only in the present dispensation."<sup>5</sup> It is correct that this is something not found in the Old Testament, and that does help distinguish the Church

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<sup>3</sup>D. A. Carson maintains that this is a fire of purification (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, "Matthew," 105), but that seems unlikely in light of the verses which follow.

<sup>4</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, "Matthew," 105.

<sup>5</sup>Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, 143.

from Israel. However, as noted in the lesson on regeneration, this is true of other works of the Spirit associated with indwelling as well, and we must exercise caution when looking back on the experience of Old Testament believers from the perspective of New Testament fulfillment. F. F. Bruce draws appropriately upon the idea of fulfillment in his definition of Spirit baptism: "*The baptism of the Spirit is the act of the exalted Christ in which He imparts His Spirit to those who believe on Him, in fulfillment of such promises as Mark 1:8; John 16:7, and thereby incorporates them as members of His body.*"<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Contrast: The Baptism of the Spirit in Pentecostalism

Pentecostals generally understand Spirit baptism to be a post-conversion event that is obtained through absolute devotion in faith and is evidenced by speaking in tongues. Most recognize that all believers are in some sense indwelt by the Spirit, but "it is usually felt by Pentecostals that not all believers are (i) *permanently*, (ii) *personally*, or (iii) *fully* indwelt by the Holy Spirit until they have experienced the Pentecostal baptism in the Holy Spirit."<sup>7</sup>

The argument of these notes has opposed the Pentecostal pattern on each of its distinctive points. Spirit baptism is not a post-conversion event, but a consequence of the indwelling of the Spirit at the moment of conversion. It is something that has already been experienced by all believers, not an experience set apart for those who can achieve a particular level of personal devotion. In addition, Spirit baptism is not associated with the particular gift of tongues, though spiritual gifts of some sort always come with the presence of the Spirit.

The important thing to note here is that believers do not need to seek any kind of "second blessing" or "second work of grace." At the moment of conversion, we are indwelt by the Spirit of God and are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ.<sup>8</sup> Still, Fee's caution is well-taken: "For Paul life in the Spirit begins at conversion; at the same time that experience is both dynamic and renewable."<sup>9</sup> We would do well to seek a greater display of the power and fruit of the Spirit in our lives, but this discussion essentially focuses on our expectations within that relationship.

Pentecostal soteriology can be characterized by many features beyond a belief in "the baptism of the Spirit" as a post-conversion experience. The remainder of this lesson explores some characteristic elements of that tradition.

### Pentecostal Soteriology: An Overview

In order to consider the nature of Pentecostal soteriology, we must first recognize the diversity of Pentecostalism. The survey which follows will attempt to describe three broad movements: Classic Pentecostalism, the Charismatic movement, and the Signs and Wonders (Vineyard) movement. Wayne Grudem (himself a member of the Vineyard movement) offers a concise summary of the differences between these groups:

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<sup>6</sup>F. F. Bruce, *Answers to Questions*, 154. By describing this as a work of the exalted Christ, Bruce is consistent with the Gospel predictions of Spirit baptism and with the promise of the Spirit in John 7, 14, and 16. This does not present a great problem to those who prefer to speak of the baptism as a work of the Spirit (e.g. Walvoord, *ibid.*). Christ's role seems to overlap considerably with that of the Spirit. Since He is the one who both asks the Father to send the Spirit (John 14:16) and sends the Spirit Himself (John 16:7), who is Himself present along with the Father in the indwelling of the Spirit (John 14:23; Rom. 8:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:45), it is not problematic to view Spirit baptism as simultaneously a work of Christ and the Spirit.

<sup>7</sup>F. D. Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, 70.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. the DTS doctrinal statement, article 8.

<sup>9</sup>Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 864.

*Pentecostal* refers to any denomination or group that traces its historical origin back to the Pentecostal revival that began in the United States in 1901 and that holds to the doctrinal positions (a) that baptism in the Holy Spirit is ordinarily an event subsequent to conversion, and (b) that baptism in the Holy Spirit is made evident by the sign of speaking in tongues, and (c) that all the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament are to be sought and used today. Pentecostal groups usually have their own distinct denominational structures, the most prominent of which is the Assemblies of God.

*Charismatic* refers to any groups (or people) that trace their historical origin to the charismatic renewal movement of the 1960s and 1970s, seek to practice all the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament (including prophecy, healing, miracles, tongues, interpretation, and distinguishing between spirits), and allow differing viewpoints on whether baptism in the Holy Spirit is subsequent to conversion and whether tongues is a sign of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Charismatics will very often refrain from forming their own denomination, but will view themselves as a force for renewal within existing Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. There is no representative charismatic denomination in the United States today, but the most prominent charismatic spokesman is probably Pat Robertson with his Christian Broadcasting Network, the television program "The 700 Club," and Regent University (formerly CBN University).

In the 1980s yet a third renewal movement arose, called the "*third wave*" by missions professor C. Peter Wagner at Fuller Seminary (he referred to the Pentecostal renewal as the first wave of the Holy Spirit's renewing work in the modern church, and the charismatic movement as the second wave). "Third wave" people encourage the equipping of all believers to use New Testament spiritual gifts today, and say that the proclamation of the gospel should ordinarily be accompanied by "signs, wonders, and miracles," according to the New Testament pattern. They teach, however, that baptism in the Holy Spirit happens to all Christians at conversion, and that subsequent experiences are better called "filling" with the Holy Spirit. The most prominent representative of the "third wave" is John Wimber, senior pastor of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Anaheim, California, and leader of the Association of Vineyard Churches.<sup>10</sup>

These different "waves" have many similarities, especially in practice, but individuals within them may have some profound theological differences. The historical survey which follows will attempt to clarify the origin and nature of those disagreements.

Throughout the history of the church there were scattered claims to phenomena such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing. For the most part, however, these spiritual gifts were either redefined to denote less supernatural activities (such as preaching), or they were thought to be unavailable.<sup>11</sup> It was not until the birth of the Pentecostal movement that such claims became much more common.

Though its roots went deep into American Methodist revivalism, the Pentecostal movement truly began with the teachings of Charles Fox Parham, who "first singled out 'glossolalia' as the only evidence of one's having received the baptism with the Holy Ghost, and who taught that it should be a part of 'normal' Christian worship."<sup>12</sup>

The first person to speak in "tongues" as a result of this teaching was Agnes N. Ozman, one of Parham's students in Topeka, Kansas. Synan writes,

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<sup>10</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 763.

<sup>11</sup>For a thorough discussion of the various claims and some of the historical statements on the subject, see my ThM thesis, "The Cessation of Special Revelation as Related to the Pentecostal Movement" (Dallas Seminary, 1985), 23-85.

<sup>12</sup>Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971, 99.

Parham and his students conducted a watchnight service on December 31, 1900, which was to continue into the new year. In this service, a student named Agnes N. Ozman requested Parham to lay hands on her head and pray for her to be baptized with the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues. It was after midnight and the first day of the twentieth century when Miss Ozman began "speaking in the Chinese language" while a "halo seemed to surround her head and face." Following this experience, Ozman was unable to speak in English for three days, and when she tried to communicate by writing, she invariably wrote in Chinese characters. This event is commonly regarded as the beginning of the modern pentecostal movement in America.<sup>13</sup>

The initial claims were absurd—Ozman's "Chinese characters" were mere scribbles, and her speech was described by newsmen as "gibberish." The event says more about local prejudice against the Chinese than it does about the work of the Spirit. Regardless, the Pentecostal movement had been born.

The basic structures were in place even in Topeka, then in the Azusa Street revivals led by William Joseph Seymour. Believers eagerly sought a post-conversion, confirmatory experience they referred to as the baptism with the Spirit, and they maintained that it would be evidenced by speaking in tongues. Though "tongues" were later interpreted by many to be "unknown languages" rather than recognizable ones, little else has changed as this movement approaches its centennial.

As they grew throughout the early part of this century, the Pentecostals had always existed in separate denominations, which were many. However, in the early 1960's certain Pentecostal practices began to work their way into some of the more "mainline" denominations. This change can be explained for a variety of reasons: the classical Pentecostals were finding it necessary to place a greater weight on education and cooperation while other denominations had been hurt badly by liberal theology and an apparently empty message in a time when the nation was seeking experiential answers. It really began with Dennis Bennett, an Episcopal pastor who claimed to have been baptized with the Spirit. He shared his experience throughout the country, and hundreds of Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, Catholics, and Baptists became a part of the "Charismatic renewal" movement without leaving their churches. Oral Roberts became a Methodist, violating the separatist teachings of traditional Pentecostals and identifying himself with the "Neo-Pentecostals."

Several distinctions should be noted between traditional Pentecostals and the Neo-Pentecostal, or Charismatic movement:

- Traditional Pentecostals tend to be fundamentalistic and separatistic, while Charismatics are generally progressive and ecumenical.
- The Charismatic movement has generally appealed to a wealthier and better educated constituency.
- Both Charismatics and Pentecostals maintain that all spiritual gifts are operative for today, and tongues, healing, and prophecy are generally given prominence. However, since Charismatics have remained within their own ecclesiastical traditions, they have not adopted Pentecostal theology as much as they have Pentecostal practices. This brings greater diversity to the Charismatic movement while also watering down some of the Pentecostal distinctives. Most prominently, not all Charismatics regard Spirit baptism as a post-conversion experience. Most teach that all believers are indwelt by the Spirit, but that an additional anointing of the Spirit empowers them for ministry.<sup>14</sup> Many Charismatics are virtually indistinguishable from their non-Charismatic brethren with the exception of their belief in the ongoing availability of certain spiritual gifts.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 101-2.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. "Charismatic Movement," by J. Rodman Williams, 205-8; Douglas Robinson, "The 'Ordo Salutis' and the Charismatic Movement," *Churchman* 97 (1983): 232-43.

Just as Pentecostalism begat the Charismatic movement, so has the Charismatic movement begotten the Signs and Wonders Movement. Also known as the Vineyard movement because of its close ties to John Wimber, the late pastor of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Anaheim, California, this movement (now a denomination) has grown to include several hundred churches. The Signs and Wonders movement is not distinctive theologically from many other Charismatic churches, but it is distinctive in its constituency, which is more evangelical, and in its emphasis, which is more evangelistic.

Wimber maintains that evangelism frequently must take place in what he refers to as a "power encounter" between God and the false beliefs of the individual concerned. God is expected to demonstrate His power and presence in miraculous fashion to convince the skeptic and enable the believer to then practice "power evangelism"—"a presentation of the gospel that is rational but which also transcends the rational" and is "usually preceded and undergirded by demonstrations of God's presence."<sup>15</sup>

With this brief survey of the various views behind us, it is appropriate to consider some of the specific problems with each position. After this, additional comments will be made with regard to issues that relate to all three groups.

## 1. A Critique of Pentecostal Soteriology

By regarding the baptism of the Spirit as a post-conversion event evidenced by tongues and obtained through absolute devotion in faith, traditional Pentecostals misunderstand the nature of the Spirit's work, misuse specific examples of conversion in the New Testament, and underestimate the continuing presence of sin in the life of the believer.

First, they misunderstand the nature of the Spirit's work. It has been argued in this class that the Spirit's work is not to be divided into several distinct activities which He accomplishes on behalf of the believer. There is a single act of indwelling, which brings new life (regeneration), secures life (sealing), and places the believer into communion with others in the body of Christ (baptism). Out of respect for Romans 8:9, most Pentecostals affirm that all believers are somehow indwelt by the Spirit, but "it is usually felt by Pentecostals that not all believers are (i) *permanently*, (ii) *personally*, or (iii) *fully* indwelt by the Holy Spirit until they have experienced the Pentecostal baptism in the Holy Spirit."<sup>16</sup> By maintaining that not enough happens at conversion, Pentecostals fail to understand the fact that eternal life itself comes as a result of the Spirit's indwelling. There can be no conversion apart from the Spirit's permanent, personal, and full indwelling.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, Pentecostals misunderstand the nature of the Spirit's work in His sovereign bestowal of spiritual gifts. By expecting all to speak in tongues as a manifestation of the Spirit's presence, they are in direct violation of 1 Cor. 12:30.

Pentecostals also misuse examples of conversion from the book of Acts. In a thorough examination of the relevant passages, Bruner demonstrates persuasively that the Spirit is promised inclusively to all believers and that He comes unconditionally, not through a post-conversion display of personal devotion.<sup>18</sup> Even when tongues are evident, they are not sought, and there is no suggestion that the "waiting" at Pentecost was ever repeated by later converts—once the Spirit came, He remained immediately available for all who would believe. Peter demonstrates in Acts 11:13-18 that the unsought, unexpected, and undemanded reception of the Spirit by the household of Cornelius was indeed the normal

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<sup>15</sup>John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Points*, 172-73.

<sup>16</sup>F. D. Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 70.

<sup>17</sup>Pentecostals also generally distinguish between 1 Corinthians 12:13 and other references to Spirit baptism. For a summary and critique of that position, see the lesson in these notes on the Indwelling of the Spirit.

<sup>18</sup>Bruner, 157-218.

conversion experience of the church. There was some delay in the Spirit's coming in Acts 8, probably to demonstrate the unity of the church under the authority of the Jerusalem apostles.

Finally Pentecostals also misunderstand the nature of continuing sin in the life of the believer when they maintain that there can be a moment of absolute dedication in which one comes to God with an utterly pure faith. Such faith itself becomes a work, but is in fact a work of futility. As Bruner writes,

Works are not any less works for having to be done internally; they are, in fact, all the more excruciating and enslaving, for who can know his heart? Pentecostalism feels that it is speaking the language of Christian devotion when it invokes its internal absolutes of surrender. But because Pentecostalism almost completely misunderstands the character of New Testament faith in its noble simplicity, Pentecostalism's devotional absolutes call believers not to grace in Christ but to groveling within their own hearts to find what is not there: the absolute.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. A Critique of Charismatic Soteriology

To the extent that Charismatic theologians maintain these Pentecostal distinctives, the same criticisms apply. However, it has already been observed that most Charismatics maintain the theological distinctives of their mainline denominations instead of following the Pentecostals on this matter, so it is difficult to group these diverse viewpoints together.

This diversity raises another problem, however. Since the Charismatic movement is held together more by common experience than by common doctrine, there is no guarantee that those who are involved in it hold to an orthodox soteriology. Divergent views on such fundamental issues as the nature of the atonement and justification by faith abound, but differences are swept under the rug by a sense of spiritual ecumenism and worship services that may lack real content. There is certainly a place for such an emphasis, but what is the price for unity?

## 3. A Critique of Vineyard Soteriology

There is much less diversity within the Signs and Wonders movement, but one must still be careful to avoid over-generalization.

Wimber's emphasis on God's sovereign demonstration of power means that he has a more passive approach to evangelism than most twentieth century preachers. This passivity is evident in his own testimony, which doesn't sound very revivalistic. He told a believer that he "wanted what he had," but the man told him, "It's too soon. You're not ready yet. Premature births don't produce healthy children. Apples fall when they're ripe."<sup>20</sup> When Wimber was converted, it seems to have been a fairly mystical event that was beyond his control or understanding as he suddenly realized his need for forgiveness.<sup>21</sup> As he practiced evangelism, Wimber seemed to desire that others follow that same pattern, in which the emphasis is on God's sovereign initiative. It was perhaps for this reason that he apparently did not always see the need to personally articulate the nature of Christ's substitutionary death or focus on the reality of personal sin.<sup>22</sup> This means that in practice the movement's soteriology can be very experience-oriented. At worst, it is not soteriology at all.

It is also appropriate to question the legitimacy of relying on miracles to persuade unbelievers. Carson describes the function of signs in John's gospel:

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 252.

<sup>20</sup>John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Points*, 25.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 116.

<sup>22</sup>Mark Thompson, "Spiritual Warfare: What Happens When I Contradict Myself," *The Briefing* 45/46 (1990): 12.

The complexities that bind together *election, faith and the function of signs* deserve some reflection. John holds men and women responsible for believing; unbelief is morally culpable. If faith bursts forth in consequence of what is revealed in the 'signs', well and good. They legitimately serve as a basis for faith (e.g., 10:38). On the other hand, people are excoriated for their dependence on signs (4:48). It is better faith that hears and believes rather than sees and believes.<sup>23</sup>

Applying this principle to the Vineyard movement, Benn and Burkill write:

Romans 10 v.17 reminds us that 'faith comes from *hearing* the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ'. We all rejoice when God sovereignly testifies to the truth of the Gospel with signs and wonders—but we must not fool ourselves that miracles persuade the sceptical mind. Nothing but the regenerating power [here I would say "efficacious grace" or "calling"] of the Holy Spirit at work through the gospel message proclaimed can do that. Often the only sign given to an unbelieving and sceptical generation will be the sign of Jonah (that is the Resurrection, see Matthew 16 v.4) which stands as a sign in every generation until the Lord returns.<sup>24</sup>

This criticism seems valid, and it means that both the message and the methodology of the Signs and Wonders movement should be questioned.

#### **4. Additional Comments**

There are several additional points which apply to each of the movements we have been considering.

##### **a. Elitism**

Whenever believers regard a particular experience as "something more" that enables them to transcend the impotent, lackluster manner of life they had previously known, it is only natural that they would come to see themselves as an elite group. This is dangerous at all levels (Rom. 12:3), but it is particularly damaging to young believers, who could easily be elevated too rapidly because of their apparent gifts (1 Tim. 3:10; 5:22). NOTE: This is true of us as well—just substitute "knowledge" for "experience."

##### **b. False Prophecy**

Deuteronomy 18:14-22 makes it clear—when God speaks, He is always right. Kenneth Hagin says, "If I'm wrong, I want to get it right. If I miss it, I just admit, 'I missed it.' . . . Just because I missed it, I am not going to quit."<sup>25</sup> What he is saying is that he cannot tell the difference between what he would call God's voice and what he would call a "miss."

##### **c. Healing and the Nature of the Gospel**

Many Pentecostals believe that healing is "the neglected half of the gospel,"<sup>26</sup> and it is common to contend that it is "in the atonement," particularly by appealing to 1 Peter 2:24.<sup>27</sup> While evangelicals

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<sup>23</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Introduction.

<sup>24</sup>Benn and Burkill, "A Theological and Pastoral Critique of the Teachings of John Wimber," 104.

<sup>25</sup>Kenneth E. Hagin, *How You Can be Led by the Spirit of God*, 112.

<sup>26</sup>Ramond M. Puritt, *Fundamentals of the Faith* (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1981), 318-19, cited by Volf, "Materiality of Salvation," 448.



frequently refute this teaching by pointing out (quite rightly) that 1 Peter 2 is talking about spiritual healing, we neglect Matthew 8:17, which also quotes Isaiah 53 but clearly applies it to the physical healings that took place through the ministry of Jesus. Is there healing in the atonement? According to Isaiah 53:4, Matthew 8:17, and Revelation 22:2, one would have to answer in the affirmative. Sickness and death exist in this world because it is fallen, and the death of Christ brings deliverance from sin and from its consequences.

Though healing is in the atonement, healing is not the neglected half of the gospel. In fact, it is not a part of the gospel at all! According to 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, the gospel consists of the death of Christ for our sins and His physical resurrection on the third day. The fact that healing is ultimately a consequence of that good news does not make it an integral part of the message, nor does it mean that it is something that can be fully experienced at the present time. The real problem with many Pentecostal positions here is not that they see healing in the atonement, but that they insert it into the gospel through an over-realized eschatology.

#### **d. Over-Realized Eschatology**

Douglas Moo writes,

As we have seen, proponents of the movement proclaim that God's will is to heal all believers *in this life*. But such a view buys into what many scholars have labelled "over-realized eschatology"—the mistake, probably the root of the problem at Corinth, of thinking that God's kingdom has already arrived in its full and final state. If this were so, we would indeed expect healing to be available for everyone; indeed, we would expect there to be no need for healing, because there would be no disease or physical incapacity of any kind—we would all enjoy transformed bodies. But God has not chosen to bring the kingdom into existence in its final state at this point in time. As the parables of Matthew 13 and other passages teach, the kingdom, which was inaugurated at Jesus' death and resurrection, has not come in its fullness. Jesus will come again to eradicate sin entirely, vanquish Satan and restore the unchallenged reign of God. The believer in this life lives in the "already-not yet" tension of this salvation-historical framework. And to expect physical well-being and divine healing to characterize every believer is to ignore the "not yet" side of this tension. Only in the final state of the kingdom has God promised to remove all disease and physical incapacity; in Jesus' miracles, in the apostles' miracles, and in those miraculous healings that still take place, God graciously "anticipates" for some individuals this final state. But to expect physical ailments to be eradicated from the church in this age is just as foolish as to expect physical death to be removed, natural disasters to stop occurring and the power of sin to be destroyed. The HWG [health and wealth gospel] is right to proclaim that God has promised to remove all our physical infirmities; but they are wrong to claim that we can expect this to take place in this life.<sup>28</sup>

... while agreeing that the body and the soul cannot ultimately be separated, and that God's salvific promises refer to both, we must ask whether there are not distinctions to be made in the *nature* and the *timing* of the salvation God has promised the soul of man on the one hand and the body on the other. That a distinction in timing is necessary is suggested by the salvation-historical "already-not yet" tension we elaborated above. A key element in the "not yet" part of the Christian's salvation is the transformation of the body. Not until death or Christ's return in glory will the bodies of believers be "redeemed" (cf. Rom 8:23) through resurrection (for those who have died) and transformation (for those who are alive at Christ's return). Until then, Christians "groan" in limited and sin-prone bodies (Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 5:2); "earthen vessels" in which "death is at work" (2 Cor 4:7-12). Without suggesting that the "already-not yet" tension is equivalent to a "soul-body" distinction—for that is clearly not the case—it remains true that the physical body is

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<sup>27</sup>Not all Pentecostals or Charismatics agree with this idea. J. Rodman Williams specifically denies it, maintaining that salvation and physical healing are distinct works of God (*Renewal Theology*, 1:365).

<sup>28</sup>Douglas Moo, "Healing in the Health/Wealth Gospel," *Trinity Journal* 9 NS (1988): 198.

clearly said not to have participated fully yet in the salvific benefits of Christ's death. Advocates of the HWG admit, of course, that Christians live in bodies that will die; but can we distinguish between the death of the body and the illnesses that afflict and often bring about the death of the body? Indeed, is not aging itself, with the limitations in physical abilities that it brings, a type of that physical incapacity of which illness is another type? Once again, the HWG has committed the error of "over-realized eschatology" in claiming that the benefits of salvation can be claimed for the *body* in this life the same way in which they can be claimed for the soul.<sup>29</sup>

Pentecostals respond to this criticism by saying that we have an *under-realized* eschatology, and at times this may in fact be true. However, Moo's point is certainly valid, for it captures the essence of the problem from a theological perspective.

### e. Dependence on Society and Culture

Hollinger maintains that the health and wealth gospel is deeply rooted in American philosophy. He writes,

Notions of wealth and health (physical well-being) have long and powerful histories in this society, and it is therefore understandable that at times these values have become integral parts of religious expression. . . . Americans have historically been concerned with physical well-being, a passion that likely contributed in part to the rise of New Thought metaphysics (including Christian Science) in the nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

He goes on to relate the movement to another American cultural theme, individualism. We have seen the influence of American philosophical autonomy before (see the notes on "Salvation in American Revivalism"), and Hollinger seems to be very much on the mark when he writes,

While the faith movement tends to stand over against American culture at one level, at another level it may well have acquiesced to the lure of American individualism and personal success. For it is the enjoyment of God, not the glory of God, which seems to have captivated the hearts and minds of the faith teaching followers.<sup>31</sup>

He sums up, "What can be said from a sociological standpoint is that the health and wealth gospel resonates in profound ways with some of the deeply embedded cultural themes of American society. Therein lies much of its success."<sup>32</sup>

The themes of autonomy and individualism are particularly demonstrated in the movement's emphasis on the necessity of personal faith. When faith is regarded as the sole condition for healing or prosperity, every individual believer is responsible for his or her future. From this perspective, the sovereignty of God means only that He is powerful enough to do whatever we want Him to do—He is not seen as the One who providentially accomplishes His purposes through all of life's experiences. When His providence is neglected, His purposes are not even sought out, let alone understood.<sup>33</sup> These ideas are reflected in the "name it and claim it" theology typified by Robert Tilton, Kenneth Hagin, and Kenneth Copeland to an even greater degree than in Wimber's Signs and Wonders movement. Even so, Benn and

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 202-3.

<sup>30</sup>Dennis Hollinger, "Enjoying God Forever: An Historical/Sociological Profile of the Health and Wealth Gospel," *Trinity Journal* 9 NS (1988): 146-47.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 148.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 149.

<sup>33</sup>It should be noted that these criticisms are more of the practical outworking of Pentecostal theology than of the formal expression of that theology. For a Pentecostal affirmation of the doctrine of God's providence, see J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 1:117-40.

Burkill maintain that "The most significant defect in Wimber's teaching appears to be a failure to appreciate the sovereignty of God and its implications." They write,

Nowhere does Wimber take seriously the possibility that it may be God's will for a Christian to suffer. There is no clear grasp anywhere in Wimber's writings of the kind of truth that the book of Job teaches. . . . We should be reminded of Joni Eareckson's words 'God could have done a miracle in healing me. He did a greater miracle in enabling me to sit in this wheelchair and smile.' This question of the sovereign will of God in sickness is crucially important. . . . Wimber's conclusion towards the end of an otherwise helpful chapter is staggering—"There are many reasons why people are not healed when prayed for. Most of the reasons involve some form of sin and unbelief" (*Power Healing*, p. 164). Yet he can *still* say 'I never blame the sick person for lack of faith if healing does not occur' (*ibid.*, p. 186)!<sup>34</sup>

Even in what we have seen to be a more theocentric approach on the part of Wimber, there is still plenty of room for good old American autonomy.

Grant Wacker also relates the current popularity of charismatic theology to American cultural trends. He writes,

There can be little question that the focus upon signs and wonders is a response to the "therapeutic culture" in which we live. "Americans have come to assume," as Charles Colson recently has written in another context, "that with the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness comes the right to live devoid of suffering, inconvenience, and risk." Yet there is more to it than that.

Power evangelism may well be an extension of the visual media orientation increasingly dominant in our society. Notice how TV entertainment works. As analyst Richard Peace puts it, TV shows typically tell lots of stories, filled with action, surprise, and suspense, all broken into bite-sized units, recurrently intercut with other narratives. If it is true, as some communications experts have argued, that we have passed the era of "logocentric" discourse and entered a new age of short, dramatic, visual demonstration, the ministry of the miraculous may be not so much a repristination of the wonder-working gospel of the first century as an accommodation to the cultural habits of the late 20th century.<sup>35</sup>

This is indeed an interesting criticism. Wimber strongly criticized his opponents for having a Western, secular, rationalistic world view, yet his own ministry may in fact have been typically North American. Benn and Burkill raise the same concern:

Wimber is rightly concerned that the Western world has in the recent past been very anti-supernatural, and he sees the signs and wonders of some third-world churches (for example, Paul Yonggi Cho's in South Korea) as providing a better model of early Christianity. His is a timely warning against the secularism of the Western church. However it is also possible to interpret the concerns associated with Wimber's ministry as a mirror-image in Christianity of current Western secular preoccupations with health and wholeness. Until recently Western thought was very dismissive of the supernatural, but there are now clear indications that the pendulum is swinging to the other extreme of being excessively credulous about the supernatural. The popularity of Wimber's ministry may simply be a Christianised reflection of this.<sup>36</sup>

The increasing popularity of the New Age movements demonstrates the validity of this analysis. The Charismatic emphasis on unity through shared experience receives a much warmer acceptance today

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<sup>34</sup>Wallace Benn and Mark Burkill, "A Theological and Pastoral Critique of the Teaching of John Wimber," *Churchman* 101 (1987): 102-3.

<sup>35</sup>Grant Wacker, "Wimber and Wonders—What About Miracles Today?" *Reformed Journal* 37 (April 1987):19.

<sup>36</sup>Benn and Burkill, "A Theological and Pastoral Critique of the Teachings of John Wimber," 109.

than it might have eighty years ago, and the movement may well be riding a rising tide of existential supernaturalism in our culture.

**g. Some Positives**

After having several negative things to say, it is important to close out these notes with some more positive comments.

1. Our evangelical churches have been enriched by the Charismatic movement, which has introduced us to new styles of music, new patterns of worship, and a greater sense of personal devotion.
2. The zeal for the Lord that is so evident among many Charismatics is personally both humbling and encouraging. Whatever one thinks about praying in tongues, few believers spend as much time in prayer as those Charismatics who worship the Lord in that way.
3. The focus on evangelism, particularly among many in the Vineyard movement, is refreshing even if it is not all that we would like it to be. Many unchurched persons are becoming a part of their movement. Even if the gospel message is not always proclaimed as clearly as it might be, many are being saved.
4. The emphasis on unity in the Charismatic movement is appropriate when compared to the extreme separatistic tendencies of many fundamentalists. We need to avoid watering down our beliefs, but we also need to practice brotherly love in the unity of the Spirit.

***For Further Reading***

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*Perhaps one of the strongest defenses of the Charismatic movement, in this edition including material on the "third wave". Worth examining, but must be read critically.*
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*This has been included in the notes as a fine refutation of prosperity theology.*
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*Catholic Charismatic exposition on healing. Widely quoted within the movement.*
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*Not as strong as Hummel, but particularly relevant in that Mallone is the pastor of the Vineyard church in Arlington, TX.*
- Moo, Douglas. "Divine Healing in the Health and Wealth Gospel." *Trinity Journal* 9 NS (1988): 191-209.  
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*Excellent discussion of the charismatic movement. Very balanced and insightful.*

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*Highly recommended for obvious reasons, though I hope to modify portions of it in the future.*
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