

M I S A I M I N G S

“Who concerning the truth have misaimed” — 2 Tim. 2:18

Misaiming concerning the Receiving of the Holy Spirit

Misaiming: “So for forty days, Jesus was with His disciples, and then He went to the Mount of Olives and ascended to His Father. Ten days later at the Feast of Pentecost...He came back as the Spirit. First we have the resurrected Jesus, now we have Jesus in all of us and dwelling in the body of Christ, the church” (*Preaching*, May-June, 1996, p. 18).

Truth: While this passage acknowledges the economic identification of Christ as the Spirit, it also reveals an inadequate grasp of the chronology and process of the resurrected Jesus’ return as the Spirit. At the time of Pentecost, the resurrected Christ, as the Spirit, already had been indwelling His believers for fifty days. The quote above fails to take into account John 20:19-22, which declares that the Lord appeared to His disciples in His mystical, spiritual body on the day of His resurrection and then “breathed into them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit on this occasion is likened to breath indwelling the believers in order to be their life. However, according to the author of the above passage, the Lord Spirit delayed His debut until the day of Pentecost (which means “fiftieth”). Actually, the Lord made two distinct appearances as the Spirit—initially in John 20 as the breath imparted into His believers and subsequently at Pentecost, following His ascension, this time not as breath but as wind. In this subsequent visitation of the Spirit, power, not life, is emphasized. Breathing, as in John 20, bespeaks and bestows life, while a strong wind, as on the day of Pentecost, connotes power. Hence, after Christ’s ascension the Spirit descended to empower the believers, outwardly clothing them with authority. It was for this reason that the Lord charged His disciples, “Stay in the city until you put on power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

What then was Christ doing during the forty days between His in-breathing on the day of resurrection and His ascension prior to the day of Pentecost? What was the purpose of the time between the initial indwelling and the outpouring? He was training His newly regenerated disciples to know Him inwardly, as the indwelling Spirit. For this purpose the Lord repeatedly

appeared to His followers and then disappeared (e.g., Matt. 28:9-10, 16-19; Mark 16:14-15; Luke 24:13-53; John 20:14-18). By this activity He was gradually weaning them from knowing Him merely outwardly according to the flesh. After forty days, when this training was complete, He ascended to the Father visually and physically, but remained and continued to reside in His followers as the indwelling Spirit prior to the day of Pentecost.

Misaiming concerning Ministry and Priesthood

Misaiming: “Every baptized believer in Jesus Christ is a priest to God anointed by the Holy Spirit in holy baptism (1 Pet. 2:9); but not all baptized believers are ministers. Jesus chose his apostles from among his disciples, but not all disciples were apostles (Luke 6:13). Priests are born of the water and Holy Spirit in holy baptism; ministers are made by call and ordination. The distinction of ministry and priesthood is a horizontal distinction before men, not a vertical distinction before God” (*Modern Reformation*, Jan./Feb., 1996, p. 24).

Truth: God’s Word makes no “distinction” between ministers and priests before either God or men. All believers are indeed priests, but according to Scripture all believers are just as assuredly ministers of Christ. Both the Old and New Testaments reveal that the priesthood and the ministry are, in fact, two aspects of the same person’s service: a priest is a minister and a minister is a priest. In the Old Testament Ezekiel declares, “The holy portion of the land shall be for the priests the ministers of the sanctuary, which shall come near to minister unto the Lord” (45:4, KJV), and Joel refers to “the priests, the Lord’s ministers” (1:9, KJV). These verses confirm that both God and His Old Testament people considered priests and ministers to be equivalent. In the New Testament, Paul concurs: “That I might be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, a laboring priest” (Rom. 15:16). Nevertheless, the above quote clearly distinguishes ministers from priests in an attempt to justify the existence of an unscripturally exclusive class of believers—ministers—accorded ecclesiastic superiority to all remaining believers who are simply priests.

Even a casual study of the Scriptures, however, establishes that all believers should not only serve God as priests, offering spiritual sacrifices to Him (1 Pet. 2:5), but also

have a responsibility to serve Christ as ministers, ministering Him to others. Addressing any and all believers reading his Epistle, the writer of Hebrews acknowledges their “having ministered to the saints and...ministering still” (6:10). Peter likewise considers every believer a minister bearing the responsibility of stewardship: “Each one, as he has received a gift, ministering it among yourselves as good stewards of the varied grace of God” (1 Pet. 4:10). Further, Peter explicitly opens the possibility of ministry to every believer by saying, “If anyone speaks, as speaking oracles of God; if anyone ministers, as ministering out of the strength which God supplies” (v. 11). Paul shares the same inclusive view, not limiting the ministry to church leaders. Admittedly, Paul and other extraordinarily gifted ministers were and continue to be given to the church as examples and models. But here lies a critical distinction: These exemplary ministers are given not to usurp or replace the ministering of believers, but rather they are given to serve as a pattern to them. Ephesians 4:11-12 affirms that God has given these ones to the Body of Christ as gifts—not to form a separate ecclesiastical class but rather to perfect “the saints unto the work of the ministry.” Thus, the goal of the ministry of the gifted ones is to equip, or perfect, all the believers so that these believers themselves may do the same work of ministry. If the gifted ministers fail to raise up such fellow ministers, then they have not fully carried out their own ministry.

The reference to the Lord’s selection of the twelve apostles from among His disciples bears no relevance to the argument that ministers are a chosen and ordained group, separate from the universal priesthood. These are two different issues. The distinctiveness of the twelve chosen apostles among the many disciples cannot be used to imply a similar distinction between ministers and priests for the simple reason that Scripture does not allow it. What Scripture does reveal is that all believers should be raised up as both ministers and priests. Yes, certain mature ones are chosen as patterns of the flock (1 Pet. 5:3), and yes, they are appointed (although not clerically ordained). Nevertheless, God’s goal for the church is that by imitating their pattern (Phil. 3:17) and being perfected, all believers would fulfill the same ministerial and priestly service. According to our divine birth and heavenly calling, we believers are at once both priests of God and ministers of Christ.

Misaiming concerning God’s Goal

Misaiming: “God is not interested in filling buildings, He is concerned with filling heaven! And He has chosen to accomplish the task by filling you with His power!” (Benny Hinn, *Welcome, Holy Spirit*, p. 228).

Truth: According to the divine revelation in the New Testament, God’s concern is not with filling heaven but with fulfilling His eternal purpose by carrying out His economy in Christ. Heaven may be the goal of religious people, but it is not God’s goal. God’s goal is the building up of the organic Body of Christ, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem, the wife of the Lamb, as the eternal corporate expression of the Triune God in Christ through His redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, transformed, and glorified people.

It is at best a partial truth to claim that God fulfills His purpose by filling us with His power. God carries out His economy not mainly by His *power* (in particular, not mainly by supernatural power) but primarily by His *life*. This is revealed clearly in the New Testament as a whole and especially in the Epistles of Paul and the writings of John. Whereas the New Testament does speak often about being filled with the Spirit both essentially and economically, it does not place much emphasis on being filled with miraculous power. According to Acts 6:3, 5, and 8 Stephen was full of the Spirit, of wisdom, of faith, of grace, and of power. This indicates that we should not focus on power to the exclusion of wisdom, faith, and grace. To exalt power over life is to misaim concerning God’s way of fulfilling His purpose.

Furthermore, one may do “many works of power” and yet not do the will of the Father. The Lord Jesus said, “Not every one who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of My Father who is in the heavens” (Matt. 7:21). The will of the Father is the will revealed in Ephesians 1 and Romans 12. In Matthew 7:22 the Lord continued, “Many will say to Me in that day [the day of the judgment seat of Christ—1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10], Lord, Lord, was it not in Your name that we prophesied, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name did many works of power?” Considered in its context, this word clearly indicates that a believer in Christ who is supposedly working for Christ may do “works of power” in the Lord’s name without doing the will of the Father. To such workers the Lord will say, “I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness” (v. 23). Such lawless ones, although eternally saved, will have no share in the coming kingdom. This is a serious warning concerning a preoccupation with works of power. God’s goal is not “filling heaven” by “filling you with His power.” God’s goal is to carry out His economy to build up the organic Body of Christ by dispensing Himself into us as life through the pneumatic Christ, the life-giving Spirit.

The Editors