

“Who concerning the Truth Have Misaimed” — 2 Timothy 2:18

Misaiming concerning Receiving the Holy Spirit in John 20:22

Misaiming: “I believe that in this passage we witness Jesus giving the disciples a *temporary* empowerment from the Holy Spirit so they could carry on their work of ministry until they would be *fully* empowered on the Day of Pentecost. This reception of the Spirit was in anticipation of the Day of Pentecost and should be understood as a partial limited gift of knowledge, understanding, and empowerment until Pentecost, 50 days later” (Ron Rhodes, *What Did Jesus Mean?*, 1999, p. 92).

Truth: This misaiming reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the distinction between the Spirit’s essential indwelling and the Spirit’s economical outpouring. God indwells His believers as their life by His spiritual essence, and He empowers His believers for His move by His economical outpouring, or clothing. When Christ breathed Himself into His disciples on the evening of His resurrection, what transpired was much more than a “*temporary* empowerment”—it was a full and eternal regeneration by the divine life of God.

At the very moment that the disciples obeyed the Lord’s command to “receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22), they became the children of God (1:12-13). In other words, the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit imparted Himself into them essentially, causing them to receive His divine life and nature, and thereby to be born of God. At their regeneration, the Lord Jesus Himself, as the essential Spirit, entered into His disciples to indwell them permanently (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 13:5). The Lord spent the following fifty days, from the day of His resurrection to the day of Pentecost, training these newly regenerated believers to know His invisible, inward, and essential presence.

On the day of Pentecost, these disciples experienced the Spirit’s economical outpouring as they were *clothed* with the Spirit for God’s move (Luke 24:49). Both events were genuine experiences of the Spirit. The former was inward and essential in order for Christ to begin to live within His believers; the latter

was outward and economical in order for Christ to move with His believers. The initial experience of the Spirit as a gentle breath was for life; the experience of the Spirit at Pentecost as a rushing wind was for power. Hence, when the disciples breathed in the Spirit initially, they received much more than “a partial limited gift of knowledge,” for they breathed in the Triune God Himself.

Misaiming concerning Being Spiritually Alive

Misaiming: “What does it mean to be spiritually alive in Christ? The moment you were born again your soul came into union with God in the same way Adam was in union with God before the fall” (Neil T. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness*, 1990, p. 42).

Truth: Adam was neither “spiritually alive” nor was his soul ever in organic union with God, even before the fall. He certainly enjoyed an intimate, though outward, companionship with his Creator in the garden (Gen. 3:8). However, though Adam “became a living soul” (1 Cor. 15:45), it is clear that he never partook of the eternal life of God. Further, due to sin he was banished from the garden “lest he...take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever” (Gen. 3:22). The tree of life typifies Christ, who repeatedly presents Himself as a vine tree and as the Giver of life (John 1:4; 6:48; 8:12; 10:10; 14:6; 15:1, 4). It is only by receiving Christ through His redemption that access to God—long forfeited by Adam—can be restored (Eph. 2:18; Rev. 22:14). Only New Testament believers, the redeemed and regenerated children of God, have a life-union with God. This inward, organic oneness is surely what God intended for Adam, yet the intrusion of sin frustrated its fulfillment. To remove this barrier between God and man, Christ came to redeem fallen humankind at Calvary, making Himself available once again as the tree of life. Now, by being joined to the Lord, His redeemed believers possess both the divine life and nature (1 Cor. 6:17; John 3:15; 2 Pet. 1:4). We not only can walk with God; even the more, our heart also is becoming His very home (Eph. 3:17), and He actually lives in us (Gal. 2:20). Being spiritually alive is to be joined to the Triune God—the Father, Son, and Spirit—in an intimate, vital life-union in our spirit (Eph. 4:6; Col. 1:27; Rom. 8:9, 11).

Misaiming concerning Being Led by the Spirit

Misaiming: “Now I know that in contemporary Christian jargon and in our patterns of speech, we talk about being led by the Spirit as to whether we turn left or turn right at the stop sign, and whether we live in Omaha, Nebraska, or Saint Louis, Missouri. We are constantly looking for guidance as if God were still around with a pillar of cloud or a pillar of fire to direct our every step....But the principal way by which the Christian life is to be led is by the Spirit’s Book. The ‘lamp unto our feet’ is the law of God. In other words, we are to be led by the principles for our behavior that God reveals” (R. C. Sproul, *Now, That’s a Good Question*, 1996, p. 255).

Truth: The indwelling Spirit directly and personally leads believers in the myriad details of life (Rom. 8:14). To trivialize the leading of the Spirit as mere “principles for our behavior” drawn from the Bible is to overlook the wonderful, inward organic union that all Christians enjoy with Christ (1 Cor. 6:17). To be sure, the Spirit often leads us by speaking to us as we read the Bible; furthermore, His subjective, inward leading will never contradict His objective written Word. Yet even more, based on the believers’ intimate life-union with the indwelling Spirit, He is able to teach us concerning all things by means of the Spirit’s anointing (1 John 2:27).

For example, as the inward, spiritual anointing He often leads us to speak certain words to others. Even the Lord Himself confirmed that when speaking to those in authority such as governors or kings, we should not premeditate our speech but that we will be given the words to speak in that hour, because “the Spirit of your Father is the One speaking in you” (Matt. 10:18-20). This intimate, organic leading is much more significant than our efforts to objectively follow the Bible, as if it only contains “principles for our behavior.” This leading is living fruit produced by a genuine union with the Spirit in our regenerated human spirit.

The Bible records a number of examples of the Spirit’s explicit leading: Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness (Matt. 4:1); Philip in his gospel preaching (Acts 8:29); Paul to Macedonia (16:6-9); Peter to adopt a radically different view of the Gentiles (10:9-16, 19); and John to see four great visions (Rev. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10).

These and many other examples make it clear that according to the pattern the Lord and His apostles established for us, believers are to be led by both the written Word and the subjective, spiritual presence of

Christ as the indwelling Spirit. The two are in absolute harmony and are equally essential.

Misaiming concerning Bishops

Misaiming: “The apostles were the first bishops, and, since the first century, there has been an unbroken line of Catholic bishops” (*Pillar of Fire, Pillar of Truth: The Catholic Church and God’s Plan for You*, 1997, p. 6).

Truth: The passage above reveals a traditional yet unscriptural understanding of God’s administrative arrangement in His church. In the New Testament, bishops and elders are in fact one and the same; the designations are used interchangeably. The word *bishop* in the Greek language (*episkopos*) means “overseer.” As one example, when speaking to the *elders* in Ephesus, Paul tells them, “The Holy Spirit has placed you as *overseers*,” thus equating the two designations (Acts 20:28). Paul again uses the terms *elders* and *bishops* as synonyms in Philippians 1:1, substituting *overseers* for *elders* when he reports that he is with “the overseers and deacons.” A third time, in a section of the New Testament describing elders, Paul designates them as overseers (Titus 1:7). He draws the same parallel in 1 Timothy 3:1-2, where he describes the eldership as “the overseership” and an elder as “the overseer” (i.e., the “bishop”).

Peter, alleged to be the first “bishop,” also equates elders with overseers. In 1 Peter 5:1, addressing “the elders among you,” he uses the gerund form of “bishop” (v. 2) in charging that their “overseeing” should be carried out “not under compulsion but willingly.” The reason for using these two different terms to describe the leading ones is both logical and obvious. The word *elders* emphasizes the *person* of the overseeing shepherd, who should possess a measure of wisdom, maturity, and age. The word *bishop*, on the other hand, emphasizes the *function* of the leading one who is commissioned to watch over the flock of God with diligence.

Peter was not the first of an unbroken line of bishops. History records that the bishops were synonymous with the elders until the second century when Ignatius erroneously elevated certain elders above others. If we truly believe that the Scriptures reveal the proper way to build the church, we should reject extra-scriptural systems of hierarchy and come back to God’s plan as revealed in His Word. The Bible speaks of spiritual overseers in the church but rejects a hierarchical structure among believers.

by the Editors