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GOD'S GRACE, PNEUMATICS AND THE INFILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



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Throughout the history of the Church there have been many discussions, erroneous teaching, utter confusion, and misinterpretation regarding the person and work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian. This essay is a humble attempt to clarify some of the more thorny issues in the matter of one particular aspect of this work of the Holy Spirit. It has to do with our responsibility to obey the Lord's command to "... be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).

GOD'S GRACE

When a person is "born again," that is, becomes a Christian, it is a result of the unmeritable and gracious work of God the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity. Jesus referred to this supernatural phenomenon as "born of the Spirit" (John 3:5, 6). In those same two verses, he designated our first, or natural birth, as "born of water," or "born of the flesh." In another passage of Scripture the second and supernatural

phenomenon of "birth" was spoken of as "made alive" because we had been "dead in sin" (Ephesians 2:5).

From the moment of his or her new birth, every Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This supernatural and gracious event is referred to as "the baptism of the Holy Spirit," and even though some denominations teach that it occurs at some later date as a "second work of grace," the Bible clearly teaches that this Spirit baptism is immediate, inevitable, and complete at the time of one's new birth in Christ. As G. Campbell Morgan was famous for saying, "believers have one baptism and many fillings."

Romans 8:9 (NKJV) clearly teaches, ". . . the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His." In other words, only Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In 2 Corinthians 5:5 (NIV), the apostle Paul affirms the fact that God ". . . has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." That "deposit," or down payment, will become complete and final only when the believer experiences physical death and goes to heaven in a glorified state. Finally one reads in I Corinthians 12:13 (NKJV), "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . ." Thus the Bible assures the believer that he or she is indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God from the moment of the new birth and on into eternity.

It is the Holy Spirit that regenerates the believer, makes the believer spiritually alive in Christ, illumines the soul to the truth of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6), guides one through the Scriptures, and empowers one to obey God's word. The Holy Spirit also brings each new believer at least one spiritual gift through which to serve God and others (1 Peter 4:10), and he enables the believer to manifest his fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.

Other verses of Scripture that confirm this gift of grace are Ephesians 1:13-14 and Acts 2:38. In his *Treatise on Grace*, eighteenth-century theologian Jonathan Edwards wrote, "I suppose there is no other principle of grace in the soul than the very Holy Ghost dwelling in the soul and acting there as a

vital principle." Paul teaches in Ephesians 2:8, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." The Holy Spirit delivers the gift of faith that enables the believer to receive Christ as Lord and Savior. He is, as Edwards taught, the very "principle of grace."

At the moment of one's new birth, the believer is often totally filled with God the Holy Spirit. There is an utter sense of newness, peace, and overwhelming love. Unfortunately, that state is too often short lived, as the cares of this world and the temptations begin to take hold of this new born "babe in Christ," and the supernatural effects of the Spirit are quenched. Throughout the life of each Christian there will be times of spiritual fullness and emptiness. Much of that depends on one's commitment to the worship of God, communion with him in prayer, the study of his Word, participating in the sacraments of water baptism and Holy Communion, and fellowship with God's people; "He who walks with the wise grows wise . . ." (Proverbs 13:20a). Emptiness comes when one is more concerned with worldly matters than those of a spiritual nature. Distractions inevitably come in many forms, but they do not necessarily have to suppress the activity of the Holy Spirit in one's life. On the contrary, they can become an opportunity for a greater impact of God's Spirit within us. In order to better understand how those situations, good and bad, affect the degree to which one is filled, or not filled, with the Holy Spirit, I would like to digress to a discussion and an understanding of "pneumatics."

PNEUMATICS

This is a branch of the science of physics having to do with the mechanical properties of air and other gases. Two pioneers in this field were the Irish chemist and physicist Robert Boyle (1627-91) who described the behavior of gases while under pressure and the French chemist Jacques Charles, who in 1787 discovered how variations in temperature affected four particular gases: carbon dioxide, hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen.

Boyle's experiments led him to conclude that "when a gas is compressed at a constant temperature, its pressure rises; i.e., squeezing a gas into half its volume will double its pressure." Likewise, if one applies a double amount of ambient pressure to a gas, one halves its volume, given a constant temperature. Thus if one applies two atmospheres of pressure (one atmosphere being 14.7 lbs. per sq. in. at sea level) to a gas, one will halve its volume.

As Charles discovered later, "When a gas is heated at a constant pressure, its volume increases in direct proportion to its absolute temperature"; i.e., doubling the temperature will double the volume.

Now that the reader is wondering what all of this discussion of physics has to do with one's degree of spirituality, I would like to draw the same analogies to the effects of "pressure" and "heat" on the "volume" of the Holy Spirit within one's inner being.

THE INFILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In his attempts to explain spiritual truths, our Lord Jesus Christ often resorted to the use of metaphors. He would use various natural phenomena or creatures to explain the hard truths that he was sent to teach. Christ often began his instructional dissertations with the statement, "The Kingdom of God is like. . . ."

In our analogy, the "gas" is represented by the Holy Spirit, or as Jesus might say "the Holy Spirit is like a gas"; the "pressure" exerted is analogous to certain situations in one's secular life, and the "heat" describes one's involvement in various God-oriented, spiritual endeavors. In the original biblical manuscripts the Greek word for Spirit is *pneuma*. It is from that root word that English words such as pneumatic, pneumonia, and pneumatology (the study of the Holy Spirit) derive. The prefix *pneumo* always carries with it the implication of air or gas. With that in mind, I beg leave to take liberty in using the analogy of "gas laws" to explain how one is or is not filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

Some might argue that the Bible also speaks of the Holy Spirit as water (John 7:38-39), but my response to that objection would be that the one substance, water, is itself composed of three molecules, a "trinity" if you will, one molecule of hydrogen and two molecules of oxygen; H₂O. Jesus used that very metaphor when he said, "the water that I shall give . . . will become . . . a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14 NKJV). That teaching implies that one has all of the Holy Spirit that one will ever have at the moment of the new birth, but that the Spirit, even though manifesting only as a trickle initially, will in time become like a "fountain." Someone has said that at the moment of our new birth we have all of the Spirit, but that he does not yet have all of us.

The use of "gas" as a metaphor more closely resembles the ubiquity, the omnipresence, of the Holy Spirit. All matter is composed of one of three states: solid, liquid, or gas. Both solids and liquids are more confined to specific locations than are gases, which actually surround the earth (the atmosphere) and are distributed within the earth's creatures and crust. It is little wonder then that the early writers of Scripture, under the influence of the Spirit himself, used the term *pneuma* in reference to him.

When a person is born physically, immediately upon that person's exit from the womb a deep breath is taken and the lungs become completely expanded with air. Then during the remainder of one's life, normal air exchange occurs at less than complete lung volumes. However, at times of extreme physical exertion, certain increased degrees of lung expansion, deep breathing, become necessary.

The Bible teaches that the first human Adam received the Holy Spirit into his soul at the time of his creation but that he lost the Spirit when he fell from grace. "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the *breath* of life . . ." (Genesis 2:7, emphasis added). Likewise, when a person is "born again," the soul is immediately filled with the "breath of God," the Holy Spirit. It is that infilling of the Holy Spirit at the time of one's regeneration in

Christ that provides the immediate sense of peace, cleanliness, forgiveness, and hope, senses that are all too often short lived. Throughout one's spiritual life there may be "deep breaths," ordinary "easy breathing," and "short pants," with regard to one's spiritual fullness or the lack thereof.

When G. Campbell Morgan (quoted above) spoke of "many fillings," he was alluding to our "mountaintop experiences." These occur during such activities as spiritual retreats, marriage life conferences or other Biblical seminars; before teaching, speaking, or preaching engagements; prior to confronting an unbeliever to whom one has been sent to witness; during the partaking of the sacraments of Holy Communion and/or water baptism; and at the time of some particularly inspirational worship services.

Contrary to those times of fillings, one is found to be less filled in proportion to the degree of external pressures and temptations confronted in one's daily experiences. The apostle Paul suffered from innumerable pressures that far exceed any that one might experience in America today, he writes, "We don't want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered . . . We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God . . ." (2 Corinthians 1: 8-9). Relying on God in this instance involves prayer, the study of God's Word, the counsel of Godly people, and, as a result, the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Now the reader should recall that Dr. Boyle discovered that the volume of a gas was reduced by increasing pressures if the temperature remained constant. Paul's outward pressures, though magnanimous, did not compress or suppress the activity of the Holy Spirit in his life, because he merely "turned up the heat" and relied on God. That means he prayed more, studied God's Word more, fellowshiped with God's people more, and worshiped more. Unfortunately, such is not the case with many of us. When tough times or distractions come into our lives we simply allow them to press down

upon the Holy Spirit and shove him off into a corner of our being. We don't pray, we don't study the Bible, we avoid God's people, and we stop attending worship services. That suppression of the Holy Spirit's activity causes him to grieve (Ephesians 4:30).

While our pressures cannot be compared with those that Paul experienced, they will reduce the Spirit's influence in our lives. Trouble in the home with one's children or spouse, stress at work, sinful behavior, bad company, chronic illness, and economic setbacks each serve to "quench" the activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Some of these pressures are the result of our own bad choices. That fact is evident in the admonition of Paul, "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19). In the preceding verses he taught how one could keep from quenching the Holy Spirit. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks . . ." (1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18).

Each of us, when experiencing the pressures that this life has to offer, can do what Paul did and what he has encouraged us to do: turn up the heat. Remember that even at a constant pressure a gas will expand when the ambient temperature rises. Thus each of us, though experiencing the usual and common pressures of daily existence, can remain filled with the Holy Spirit if we simply apply the heat of God's Word, regular prayer, worship, and Christian fellowship. God encouraged his weeping prophet Jeremiah when he asked, "Is not my *word like fire* . . . and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" (Jeremiah 23:29, emphasis added). Applying the "fire" of God's Word, through an intensive study during personal devotions and through attending a Sunday school class or weekly Bible study will keep the heat on and counteract the pressure. The great biblical sage King Solomon said, "Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning." (Proverbs 9:9). The greater wisdom and learning result from the infilling of the Holy Spirit, the One who inspired the writers of the Bible.

When a Christian prays to God the Father, that prayer is mediated by the work of God the Son (1 Timothy 2:5) and is

inspired by the Holy Spirit; the heat is turned up. "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will" (Romans 8:26-27). It is during these times of intense and fervent prayer that believers are greatly filled with the Holy Spirit.

The heat which expands the Holy Spirit's influence on the Christian may also come in the form of adversity. President Harry Truman was famous for saying, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." Peter instructs believers, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by *fire may be proved genuine* and may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1:6-7, emphasis added). James too speaks of the heat of adversity that is instrumental in the growth of a Christian, and "growth" means that one is being filled by the Holy Spirit. "Consider it *pure joy*, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish the work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking in anything" (James 1:2-4, emphasis added). Note that each of these brothers said that hardships should be a cause for joy, and that is based upon the fact that those adverse experiences make us more Christ-like, because we have become more filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Lord speaks of that heat, which he purposefully applies, in the words of King Solomon: "The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the heart" (Proverbs 17:3). A silversmith uses the intense heat of a crucible to melt and rid the silver of its impurities, decanting off the dross after each heating. He knows that the silver is pure when he can see his reflection in its surface. God will turn up the heat of adversity in each of our lives until he can see Christ

reflected in us (see 2 Corinthians 3:18), and that comes about only when we have become filled with his Holy Spirit.

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