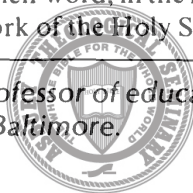

Holy Spirit and Holy Scripture

by Timothy L. Smith

The Old Covenant in the New

Most of the major New Testament passages that promise the gift or the sanctifying fullness of the Holy Spirit are based directly on Old Testament Scriptures. John the Baptist proclaimed that the coming of Messiah to establish His Kingdom was at hand, and that he would baptize “with the Holy Ghost and fire,” adding the notion of baptism to what Isaiah 4:4; 32:1, 15-16; and 40:3, 7 declared about the sanctifying Spirit in the coming Kingdom. Jesus, in the synagogue at Nazareth, proclaimed His mission in the words of Isaiah (61:1-3) which everyone present knew were an echo of the messianic promises in Isaiah 11:2, 4 (“the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him,” and “with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth”) and Isaiah 42:1 (“I will put my Spirit on Him and He will bring justice to the nations.”). When our Lord spoke to a sinful woman in Samaria about “a spring of water welling up to eternal life,” and when He cried out to the crowds gathered in Jerusalem on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, “whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him (John 4:14 and 7:38), his disciples understood Him to be paraphrasing God’s promise in Isaiah 44:3, “for I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.” He may also have been alluding to Isaiah’s invitation to “all you who are thirsty” to “come to the waters” (Isaiah 55:1). For both water and fire were Old Testament symbols of the cleansing, refining Spirit of the Lord. Christ’s promise of “another Comforter” to His apostles and all who would hear their word, in the hours surrounding the Last Supper, described the work of the Holy Spirit in the new age exactly

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as the prophets had. He would be their comforter, or advocate, guide them into “all truth,” bring them holiness, peace, and fullness of joy, and convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

Luke and John made what Jesus called the “promise of the father” central to their account of the teaching of the risen Lord. On the eve of His ascension Jesus identified the fulfillment of that promise with the disciples’ baptism with the sanctifying Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Earlier, however, he gave them the assurance of life in the Spirit, of a new creation. In the simple words of John, Jesus “came and stood among them” on the evening of Easter day, and said, “Peace be with you!”; a moment later He “breathed on them” and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:19-22). In Luke’s account, Jesus had earlier that day explained to two of them on the road to Emmaus what was said in the Scriptures concerning himself, beginning “with Moses and all the prophets.” During the evening, he reminded them that before the crucifixion he had told them “everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.” Therefore, he told them, “I am going to send you what my father has promised,” and He directed them to stay in the city until they had been “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:44-45, 53). This “gift my father promised,” he told them on the day of His ascension, was exactly what John the Baptist had first announced: he would “baptize them with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4, 5).¹

That the short-course in scriptural (that is, Old Testament) theology Jesus gave the apostles after his resurrection took deep root in their minds is clear from the entire content of the New Testament, but especially from Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, which began with the text from Joel 2:28-32, echoing Isaiah 32:15-18. Then, by reference to David’s Psalm 16, Peter linked the resurrection also to Old Testament assurances that a greater Son would reign on David’s throne. He then cited Jesus’ own words to explain that the exalted Christ had, as the prophets had foreseen, “received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit” and “poured out what you now see and hear.” Peter concluded with the declaration that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was proof that the crucified one was “both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:34, 36 and Matthew 22:43-44). When awakened Jews asked what they must do, he replied in the words of John the Baptist, “Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift

of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). That gift, Peter went on to say (true to Jesus’ linking of it to the Great Commission), “is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39, and Luke 24: 47-49).²

Little wonder that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit became in Christian understanding a central theme of the New Testament theology of salvation. Its reigning place in the words of John the Baptist and Jesus, and in the apostolic witness recorded in Acts and the epistles of Paul, is unmistakable. The living presence of the Spirit of the Lord illuminates the truth of Scripture and convinces us of both our sins and God’s grace through Christ to take away their guilt and power.³ The hallowing Spirit enables us in a divine moment of “living faith” to experience that forgiveness and deliverance. This is the biblical answer to the call of both nature and revelation that we do what in our own strength we cannot: love God with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves.

The Spiritual Unity of Law and Grace

Moreover, all of the apostolic writings, including those of Paul, who was “born out of time” to the office, show how clearly the early Christians grasped the unity of the Old and the New Testaments.⁴ Both proclaimed the gospel of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — of covenant, cross, and comforter.

Jesus’ linkage of grace to Moses and the prophets made forever invalid any form of antinomian Christianity, or any theology that excused those who had experienced new life in the Spirit from obedience to the moral law. Peter perceived this clearly at the house of Cornelius, a centurion in the Roman army, when he said, “God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (Acts 10:34). Later, when Peter wrote his first letter to the churches, this Hebrew of the Hebrews addressed it to “God’s elect, strangers in the world” scattered throughout Asia Minor, who were “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ.” In his “great mercy,” God had given both Jews and Gentiles “new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” Peter went on to say, a salvation that the prophets had foreseen and the apostles had preached “by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.” He urged them “as obedient children” to reject all evil desires; and quoting Moses in the manner of Jesus, he exhorted them,

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“just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy because I am holy’” (I Peter 1:1-3, 14-15).

Peter’s grasp of this New Testament truth in its Old Testament setting prevailed in the Jerusalem community, and in the places to which its Christian Jewish members scattered after the outbreak of persecution. This is apparent in the letter to the Hebrews. Its author declared that “the people of God” may now enter the Canaan of “Sabbath-rest” that is their heritage (Hebrews 4:9). For their “great high priest” has opened for them and for all humankind a “living way” to enter “the most holy place” — through the “rent curtain” of His own body (Hebrew 4:14, 9:11, and 10:19-20). The opening up of that way inaugurated the new covenant that Jeremiah and Ezekiel had prophesied (Hebrews 8:8-12, and 10:16, quoting Jeremiah 31:31-34). The words that almost immediately follow comprise as stern a rejection of the idea that a believer may “deliberately keep on sinning” after he had “received the knowledge of the truth,” as appears in all of Scripture. To do this, the writer declared, was to treat “as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant” and to insult “the Spirit of grace” (Hebrews 10:26-29).

The writings of Paul that proclaim this sanctifying work of the Spirit, this actual imparting of holiness, rest upon a similar conviction of the biblical unity of law and grace. The new life of peace with God, of freedom from condemnation that believers enjoy “who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit,” signifies “that the righteous requirements of the law” may be “fully met [“fulfilled” — KJV] in us” (Romans 5:1, 8:1, 4). All this is possible “because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given unto us” (Romans 5:5). Although the law, Paul writes, is “holy, righteous, and good,” indeed “spiritual,” it could not, despite all its edifying instruction to our conscience, enable us to obey (Romans 7:12, 14, and 8:3). But “by sending His own son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering,” God both “condemns sin in sinful man” and plants in believers “the law of the Spirit of life” to set them “free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2-4).⁵ Paul’s letter to the Galatians also declares that Christ has “redeemed us from the curse” of relying upon the law we could not keep, so that “the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus.” Thus Jews and Gentiles alike “receive the promise of the Spirit” (Galatians 3:13-14).

Paul’s reasoning on this subject, in both the Roman and Galatian

letters, had the immediate practical purpose of helping Jews and Gentiles alike to embrace the universalizing of the law that the Gospel had made possible. The incarnation of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit were the ground of a theology of liberation from all sin and consecration to all loving and holy compassion. In both epistles Paul declared, as Jesus had, that the entire ethical obligation of the law “is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Galatians 5:14 and Romans 13:9).

Precisely at this point we see the deep unity between the teachings of Paul and those of Christ our Lord. This unity has often been questioned by critical scholars whose specialized study of the one led them to neglect the other. Paul and Jesus saw eye to eye on the principle that the law is to be kept by divine grace, or “fulfilled” — fulfilled by the love of God and other persons that can only be poured into our hearts by the hallowing Spirit (Matthew 5:17-18; Romans 5:5). When Jesus and Paul recited the two greatest commandments, they were both deeply conscious they were quoting the summaries of the decalogue that Moses himself had used to help the ancient Israelites grasp the promise of God that was implied in the law (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18). Both understood that, as the prophet Ezekiel put it, the law of God was to be written in believers’ hearts by the indwelling Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 36:36). This was the “grand promise” of the prophets.

The Creating Spirit

On one other point also, Paul’s most profound teaching was precisely that of Jesus: the work of the Holy Spirit is to make us “a new creation,” to renew us in the image of God, “in righteousness and true holiness” (2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 4:24). Jesus taught Nicodemus the rudiments of this doctrine and instructed the apostles in its full meaning on the eve of His crucifixion and on the day He rose from the dead.

Christ’s teaching was grounded in creation theology, in the biblical conviction that the sanctifying Spirit was also the creating Spirit. He is the breath of God; He gives life to all that lives, and righteousness to all who trust in God’s hallowing grace. The second verse of the book of Genesis declared that at the beginning “the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” In Hebrew understanding, the Holy Spirit executed each stage of the design of creation.

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Now the word “spirit” in Hebrew means, literally, “breath” or “wind.” Because Genesis 2:7 declares that “God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being,” Jews understood that the Spirit creates and sustains both natural and spiritual life, as succeeding passages in Genesis and other parts of the Bible declare (compare especially Job 27:3 and 33:4, Psalms 33:6, and Ezekiel 37:9). When, therefore, Jesus found Nicodemus mystified at His statement that a person must be born again, “born of water and the Spirit,” he asked, “You are Israel’s teacher, . . . and do you not understand these things?” (John 3:5, 10). Jewish Christians who heard and later read this story understood Jesus to be speaking of the creation of new life — “life in the Spirit.” The Master’s use of the metaphor of water alongside that of breath, both here and in His conversation with the woman of Samaria, drew upon Old Testament imagery of similar import. In desert lands, water, created by or flowing from God, was the fountain of physical and the symbol of spiritual life. John’s Gospel records Jesus’ return to the earlier imagery after the resurrection, when He greeted his disciples, “breathed on them,” and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). And Luke gave both the metaphor and the experience a more profound meaning in his account of Pentecost. At the moment in which the 120 believers were “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4) they heard a “sound like the blowing of a violent wind” (or “breath;” Acts 2:2).⁶

Saint Paul, always thinking in Hebrew even while dictating to his scribe in Greek, drew upon all this rich imagery of the creating and hallowing Spirit that flows through the teachings of the Old Testament and the words of Jesus. “All Scripture,” Paul wrote, “is God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16; the King James version reads, “given by inspiration of God”). That is, its truth was literally breathed into the minds and hearts of those who were writing down what the Holy Spirit inspired.

In the same fashion, Paul understood that the “new self” was “God breathed,” “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24; compare Colossians 3:10). We are saved, Paul wrote earlier to the Ephesians, not by our own works, but by the grace of God, who chose us “before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless” before him “in love.” In the experience of salvation, we become “God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians

1:4, 2:9-10). Through Christ, Paul continued, Jews and Gentiles alike “have access to the Father by one Spirit”; in Him God’s children “are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Ephesians 2:18, 22). Accordingly, Paul prayed that the Ephesians might be strengthened “with power through His Spirit” dwelling in their hearts in love, be “rooted and established,” and know “the love of Christ . . . that surpasses knowledge.” Why? So as to be “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” and to help the body of Christ attain to “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 3:15-16, 19, and 4:13). Similarly, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul wrote that what really counts is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision but to “receive the promise of the Spirit” and so become “a new creation” (Galatians 3:14, 6:15; compare Titus 3:5 and 1 Corinthians 15:45-49). Those who thus “live by the Spirit,” Paul declared, do not “gratify the desires of the sinful nature”; for “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:16, 22).

In the new creation, as in the one celebrated on the first sabbath, God rejoices in His handiwork — the work accomplished by His renewing and sanctifying Spirit. The idea of renewal in the image of God, so central to St. Paul’s teachings, became a dominant theme in the writings of the early church fathers. The son of God appeared in order to destroy the devil’s work, they knew; and the Spirit of the God who is love restores fallen human beings to the beauty of holiness.

The Hallowing Spirit

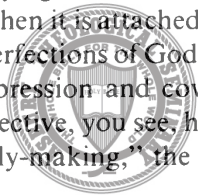
Perhaps nowhere does St. Paul come closer to the spiritual heart of the Old Testament than when he describes, in the early part of his second letter to the Corinthians, how the Holy Spirit draws free and responsible human beings under the sovereign will of God so He may accomplish that renewal. The sanctifying One does this through the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Paul reminded his readers that even at Sinai the law (that “brought death” and was “engraved in letters on stone,” rather than on our hearts) was revealed in such glory “that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses” because of it. “How much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness,” Paul cried (2 Corinthians 3:7, 9). Unlike the Israelites who veiled Moses’ face to hide from that glory, he

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continued, “whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” So believers who “with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (3:16-18). A moment later Paul pointed the image of divine glory back to the dawn of creation and into the wonder of the Holy Trinity, saying, “God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness, made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ’” (4:6).⁷

Thus did the unfolding revelation of the doctrine of the Hallowing Spirit in the Holy Scriptures reach its fulfillment in the teaching and experience of the early Christian believers. Clearly, the New Testament passages show that by His incarnation, atonement, and resurrection, and by the gift and outpoured fullness of His Spirit, Christ brought them the fulfillment of what the prophets had declared was the promise of the new covenant: not just the objective designation of sacred things, places, and priestly or other offices as holy, but the transformation of persons into the image and likeness of God.⁸ The Lord’s promises and commands to His people to be holy, as He is holy, repeated four times in the book of Leviticus (11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7-8, 26) point to renewing grace, to imparted righteousness.⁹ The promises recur again and again: in the word of hope given through Moses, “the Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love Him with all your heart and soul, and live” (Deuteronomy 30:6); through Ezekiel, “I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and . . . will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Ezekiel 36:25-27); and through Joel, not only to Jews but all of humanity, “I will pour out my spirit on all people” (Joel 2:28). All of these echo in both text and context the words of Isaiah of Jerusalem that when “the Spirit is poured upon us from on high . . . justice will dwell in the desert and righteousness live in the fertile field” (Isaiah 32:15).¹⁰

Precisely in this sanctifying action do we find the Hebrew meaning of the adjective “holy” when it is attached to divinity. The word does not point simply to the perfections of God’s loving holiness, standing over against human oppression and covetousness, but to its self-giving character. The adjective, you see, has a verbal connotation. It means, literally, the “holy-making,” the “sanctifying” Spirit. John



Wesley often translated His blessed name in the beautiful old English words, “hallowing Spirit.”¹¹ His breathing Presence created humanity in love and freedom; now, He sanctifies fallen persons who will through faith in Christ surrender to His lordship. The name God gave Himself in the conversation with Moses at the burning bush declared both His eternal being and His saving presence; “Jehovah,” Charles Isbell once taught us, seems to mean “I am that I am *present*” (Exodus 3:14).¹²

Such a scriptural understanding of the sanctifying work of the Spirit must always be the ground we Wesleyans stand upon when explaining the steps or stages by which He brings about the “new creation” and makes fallen human beings holy.

Conviction and conversion come first in the order of salvation. Biblically, all of God’s prevenient grace in bringing us to conviction and repentance for our sins and convincing us that “He is faithful and just and will forgive” (1 John 1:9) is the work of the Holy Spirit, applying the truth of Scripture to our condition. That we repentant seekers are “born again” when we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, witnessing with our spirits that we have begun a new life of victory over the guilt and power of sin, is the high biblical doctrine of regeneration that John Wesley and our fathers in the Holiness Movement taught (John 3:5-7, Romans 8:16, 1 John 3:23, 4:13). “If you love me,” Jesus said to his troubled disciples, “you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15; compare 14:23-24 and 15:10). Such loving obedience, or loyalty, they knew, was and ever would be the work of God’s Spirit, and the mark of saving grace (1 John 2:29-3:10).

To all who so walk in love, Jesus promised a deeper experience of grace: the Father would fill them with His Holy Spirit, and “streams of living water” would flow from within them (John 7:38-39).¹³ The Comforter, Jesus said, who is one with the Father and the Son, would abide in their hearts always, purifying them from all corruption, as a living vine purifies its branches, and guiding them through confusion and dismay “into all truth” (John 14:16-18, 21-26, 15:2-3, and 16:13; compare 1 John 2:20, 26-27). This sanctifying Comforter, the Christ within, would bring a deep and abiding *shalom*: “My peace I give to you,” Jesus declared (John 14:27). The experience of inward righteousness and peace, He said shortly afterwards, yields fullness of joy. And that completeness of righteousness, peace, and joy is evidence of purity of heart and perfect love — a love so full that they

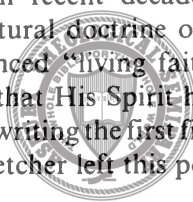
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would freely devote their entire will to the will of God (John 15:9-13; compare Romans 14:17).¹⁴

The notion recently advanced that the holy apostles were not born again until Pentecost denies nineteen centuries of Christian interpretation. It will not stand up against either these words of Jesus or the experience of regenerate members of both the apostolic and the modern church. All true believers have depended on the Holy Spirit to keep them to the standard of trust and obedience that the disciples displayed from the day they responded in faith to Jesus' call to follow Him. Though the apostles were veiled off from full knowledge of the place of the cross in the plan of redemption until Easter's dawn, they experienced amidst their struggle with the remains of pride and self-will the saving power of the One who, Jesus said, ". . . is with you and shall be in you" (John 14:17). They baptized repentant believers in Christ's name, in the same manner they had themselves been baptized by John. When our Lord sent them out two by two to proclaim the Good News, they found the devils subject to their faith. After the resurrection, even Thomas the doubter could cry, astonished, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28) — a testimony John Wesley quoted repeatedly as an illustration of the witness of the Spirit to regeneration. And a graciously humbled Peter, who would never again trust in his own moral courage to keep him loyal to Christ, testified, "Lord, you know I love you"; and Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs" (John 21:15). Yet the Apostles waited for forty days, as did the other believers, both men and women, for what Jesus called the "promise of the Father" to purify their hearts in the baptism of the Spirit. And when the day of Pentecost came, they were each and all "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4-5; 2:4; 15:9).

Preaching Holiness in the Spirit

These scriptural teachings should help Wesleyans in our preaching and teaching of entire sanctification to avoid associating every New Testament text that proclaims the presence and power of the Holy Spirit with the second work of hallowing grace. Holiness preachers from Wesley's day until recent decades avoided this, and thus sustained the high scriptural doctrine of regeneration. They knew that those who experienced "living faith" in Christ have always believed and confessed that His Spirit had come into their hearts. During the years he was writing the first five volumes of his *Checks to Antinomianism*, John Fletcher left this point unclear. He thought it



exalted the dispensation of the Holy Spirit to declare that many if not all of the three thousand devout Jews who repented and were baptized after Peter's sermon on Pentecost Day were in that moment made pure in heart. John Wesley found an opportunity gently to correct his friend and admirer when he read the first draft of Fletcher's *Last Check*. All believers received the Spirit in the moment of their regeneration, Wesley wrote Fletcher a few days later, calling to mind Romans 8:2, 9 and 14; but all are not sanctified wholly. Convinced by Scripture, Fletcher rewrote his manuscript, and both Charles and John Wesley approved it heartily before publishing this classic exposition of Wesleyan perfectionism. In its closing sections Fletcher made crystal-clear what Wesley had always observed — the distinction between “receiving” and being “filled” with the Spirit.¹⁶

Bible students need to approach the instances of the gift, the outpouring, or the filling with the Holy Spirit that are recorded in Acts with the same care for the context and substance of scriptural language that Wesley displayed in his study of the Pentecost event. You must remember, of course, that the primary purpose of Luke's history was not to distinguish between a first and a second work of sanctifying grace but to proclaim that the fullness of the Spirit is promised to all human beings, whether Jews or Gentiles. Certainly, you may argue, in as careful regard for accurate exegesis as for spiritual reality, that the Samaritans who believed and were baptized by Philip did not experience the full witness of the Spirit to their regeneration until Peter and John came down from Jerusalem and “prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:14, 15). But I think you may not on that account assume that another of Philip's converts — the African statesman whom he talked and prayed with, led to saving faith, and baptized on the road to Gaza — did not know the Spirit's witness to his new birth. A long tradition has it that this official in the court of Queen Candace returned to his native Ethiopia and began the conversion of that land to faith in Jesus Christ. Was he not sustained on his way by the consciousness of having received the Spirit of God?

By contrast, however, when Luke tells us in explicit terms that after Peter and John returned from their first appearance before the Sanhedrin, the company of believers who had held them up in prayer were all “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 4:31), we may properly join Wesley in believing that they had experienced the same “full renewal” of their souls “in righteousness and true holiness,” the

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same “love of God filling their hearts, and constraining them to love their neighbor as themselves” that the apostles did at Pentecost.¹⁷ Likewise, Saint Paul’s testimony before Agrippa — that he believed on Christ and became obedient “to the vision from heaven” on the road to Damascus — is complemented by Luke’s record that three days later Ananias laid hands upon Saul of Tarsus and prayed, by divine direction, that he might be “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:3-6 and 26:13-19). These seem clearly to have been cases of entire sanctification.¹⁸

You may also embrace with contentment Luke’s three accounts of the experience of Cornelius, concerning which Wesleyan scholars have sometimes disagreed. John Wesley was convinced that when Peter found himself saying that “God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right” (Acts 10:35), he meant to affirm that Cornelius had experienced the “living faith” that transforms moral life. For although in all of Scripture, as in Wesley’s writings and in the long history of Christian evangelism, repentant seekers fear God before they experience saving grace, none can “do what is right” until he or she has received “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:2). Peter’s succeeding words indicated that Cornelius’ household not only obeyed the law but knew the Gospel. “You know,” he said, “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power.” As he reviewed for them the essentials of the Gospel, Luke’s record tells us, “the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message,” to the astonishment of the Jewish believers who accompanied Peter (Acts 10:37, 38, 44, 45). Later, Peter recounted that event, first to the congregation at Jerusalem, and again to the apostolic council there. He recalled that when the Spirit fell upon Cornelius’ household, he remembered the promise John the Baptist made to all his converts, “You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” And he rejoiced that God had “made no distinction” between laypersons and apostles, men and women, Jews and Gentiles, “for he purified their hearts by faith” (Acts 11:16, 15:9).¹⁹

Concerning regeneration, the canon of both Old and New Testament Scripture forbids Christian ministers to yield to the popular clamor which insists that sinning is unavoidable in the Christian life and may even confer greater glory on God’s grace. Some of the earliest believers at Rome were attracted to this idea. Paul responded sternly, “By no means!” He declared that believers

who had found deliverance from the dominion of sinful nature must “walk in the Spirit” so that “the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met” (Romans 6:1-2 and 8:4). God’s call to obedience pervades the writings of the prophets and appears on nearly every page of the apostolic writings; indeed, the promise of the Spirit, wherever it occurs in Scripture, meant enablement by God’s grace to obey His will. The aging John wrote a later generation of early Christian saints that “if we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Loving obedience, in the power of the Spirit, is the scriptural way to prepare yourself for the experience of purity of heart and perfect love, as well as to grow in holiness, both before and after that crowning experience.

Finally, then, when we grasp the whole range of biblical promises of restoration in God’s moral image, we cannot, as Wesley and our fathers did not, so emphasize the two high moments of sanctifying grace (regeneration and heart cleansing) as to minimize the day-by-day renewal of our personalities, attitudes, and conscious or unconscious habits of deed or thought.²⁰ The Holy Spirit continues to breathe the righteousness of God into sanctified believers, making us more and more like Christ Jesus. Indeed, the necessity of those high moments rests in the fact that they deliver us from first the dominion and then the presence of the inward bent to sinning, so enabling us to pursue more earnestly all that is implied in being perfect as God is perfect, being holy as He is.

In summary, the Scriptures proclaim the doctrine of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, whose steadfast love, revealed to fallen human beings in all times and places by the constant drawing of His Spirit upon our minds and consciences, is the source of “every good and perfect gift.” how foolish that we should try to confine the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Hallowing Spirit to a period of human history that began only at Pentecost. Dare we suppose that all those who came out from Jerusalem to Jordan to be baptized of John, confessing their sins, received from the Holy Spirit no assurance of forgiveness nor any renewal in righteousness? And what shall we say of Abraham, of Joseph, and of Moses, who by faith “received the promise,” foresaw Israel’s redemption from bondage, and “chose to be mistreated along with the people of God”; or of all

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that other “great cloud of witnesses” who look upon us from the realm of eternal glory, rejoicing that God had “planned something better for us, that only together with us would they be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:17, 22, 25, 40, and 12:1).

End Notes

All Scripture quotations in this essay are taken from the New International Version of the Bible.

¹Much of the above finds corroboration in both the exegeses and the interpretations of Otto Procksch, in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, tr. Geoffrey W. Bromley (6 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:90, 92-4, 102-103, 107-108, 111-112; of Friedrich Baumgartel, in the same, 6:360; and of Eduard Schweizer, in the same, 6:384-5, 397, 424.

²Charles W. Carter and Ralph Earle, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 33-39.

³James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians, As Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1975), 201-8, 294-5, 320, 326, 350-56, and elsewhere, confirms the general point, in an interpretative framework that wanders far afield from it.

⁴See, again, Schweizer, in Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 6:424-25, 432.

⁵The writings of John Wesley, covering virtually his entire life, contain consistent summaries of this interpretation of Paul’s teaching on this point in Romans, especially in John Wesley, “The Original, Nature, Property, and Use of the Law” [sermon from Romans 7:12, probably composed November 1-7, 1749, *Works* (14 vols.; New York, 1872, reprinted, Kansas City, Mo., 1979), 5:434-35, 437-46; John Wesley, “The Law Established Through Faith: Discourse II” [sermon from Romans 3:31, probably composed November 1-7, 1749], the same, 458-60, 462-66; and John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon The New Testament* (2 vols.; London, 1757), notes on Romans 7:10-8:4.

⁶Baumgartel, in Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 6:363-66; Charles W. Carter, *The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit: A Wesleyan Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 38-46.

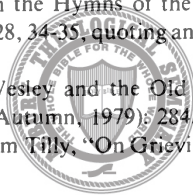
⁷Schweizer, in Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 418, 433-34.

⁸Joseph Agar Beet, *Holiness as Understood by the Writers of the Bible, A Study* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1880), 12-24, 36-48; Handley C.G. Moule, *The Cross and the Spirit* (London: Pickering & Englis, Ltd., n.d.), 44-47.

⁹James A. Sanders, “Biblical Visions of the Holy: Canonical Ethics,” a paper presented to the Colloquy on the Hallowing of Life, the University of Notre Dame, November, 1982, 2-5, and *passim*. Cf. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon The Old Testament* (3 vols.; Bristol, 1765, reprinted, Salem, Ohio, 1975), on Deut. 6:5, Psalms 51:5, 7-10, Isaiah 4:3-4, Jeremiah 31:31, 33, Ezekiel 36: 25-29, Joel 2:29; and Timothy L. Smith, “The Holy Spirit in the Hymns of the Wesleys,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 16 (Fall, 1981), 20-26, 28, 34-35, quoting and interpreting a broad selection of their early poetry.

¹⁰John N. Oswalt, “John Wesley and the Old Testament Concept of the Holy Spirit,” *Religion and Life*, 48 (Autumn, 1979): 284, 287-91.

¹¹[John Wesley, from] William Tilly, “On Grieving the Holy Spirit,” [a sermon on



Ephesians 4:30, “written in 1733”], in Wesley, *Works*, 6:44-86. Cf. Procksch, in Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 1:113, in reference to 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and 1 Peter 1:2; and Schweizer, in the same, 6:399.

¹²Charles Isbell, “The Divine Name, *Hay Yod Hay Alaph*, as a Symbol of Presence in Israelite Tradition,” *Hebrews Annual Review*, 2 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978), 101-18.

¹³Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, on John 7:38-39, clearly relating Jesus’ promise of Pentecost to his teaching concerning Christian perfection, interpreting the passage to mean that the believer’s “inmost soul shall be filled with . . . abundance of peace, joy, and love” and so with “those fruits of the Spirit” that “were not yet given, even to true believers, in that full measure.” Compare Wesley’s more cryptic comment on the same text in John Wesley, *Christian Perfection* [a sermon on Philippians 3:12, which I believe may have been composed as early as November, 1739], in *Works*, 6:6, 10, and 16-17; and comments on the same text in John Fletcher, “Essay on Truth,” in *First Part of an Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism* . . . (London, 1774), in his *Works* (New York, 1877-78; reprinted, 4 vols.; Salem, Ohio: Schmul, 1974), 3:590n. William Barclay, *The Promise of the Spirit* (London: Epworth Press, 1960), 32, closely parallels the Wesley-Fletcher interpretation of John 7:38-39.

¹⁴Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, on John, chapters 14-17, especially on 14:17, 20, 21, 23, 27; 15:4-5; 16:26, 30; and 17:9, 10, 17, 26.

¹⁵Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teachings on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today*, in *Studies in Biblical Theology, 2nd series*, Vol. 15 (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson; and London: SCM Press, 1970), 40-45, 51-52; and Fredrick D. Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit: The Pentecostal Experience and the New Testament Experience* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1971), *passim*. Both volumes seem to have begun as polemics against the Pentecostal movement; but their arguments are antithetical also to the views of the Keswick and Wesleyan holiness movements as well. Bruner studies Acts almost without reference to the Gospel of Luke.

¹⁶John Wesley, Chester, 16 March 1771, to Joseph Benson, in his *Letters* . . . (John Telford, ed.; 7 vols.; London: Epworth Press, 1931), 5:228-29, declaring, “one that is perfected in love, or filled with the Holy Ghost, may properly be termed a father in Israel” (the last phrase being his usual characterization of one who enjoys the experience of entire sanctification) accords with Wesley’s use of such phrases as “filled with the love of God” or “filled with pure love” in his *Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (London, 1760, greatly compressed five years later in Wesley’s *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*), to be found in Albert Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 287-293, 296.

I have summarized the consistency of Wesley and Fletcher on these points, while describing Wesley’s only rare use of the terms “baptized” or “filled with the Holy Ghost” in my article, “How John Fletcher Became the Theologian of Wesleyan Perfectionism, 1770-1776,” *The Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 15 (Spring, 1980): 71-2, 75-6, 79. Cf. Wesley, *Explanatory Notes* on John 20:22, Matthew 3:11, Luke 24:34, and John 21:15.

¹⁷John Wesley, “Scriptural Christianity,” [sermon from Acts 4:31, prepared for his last sermon at Oxford, August 24, 1744], *Works* 5:40-47, 47-9, where being filled with the love of God and filled with the Holy Spirit are equated. Cf. Wesley, *Explanatory Notes* on Acts 10:35 and 15:9.

Holy Spirit and Holy Scripture

¹⁸Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 98-109, argues powerfully that Paul's experience on the Damascus road was a transforming "resurrection appearance" of Jesus, from which his life in the Spirit dates, and that 2 Corinthians 3:18-4:6 represents a retrospective description by Paul of the transforming "glory" of that appearance. Kenneth Grider, "Spirit-Baptism, The Means of Sanctification: A Response to the Lyon View," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 14 (Fall, 1979): 33-35, presents the other side of the question: the meaning of Paul's experience when Ananias prayed for him that he might be filled with the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹Grider, "Spirit-Baptism," in the place cited, 35-40. Cf. Wesley, *Explanatory Notes* on Acts 10:35 and 15:9; and my effort to clarify how we are to understand the cryptic character of Wesley's comments in general in these notes on Acts, in Timothy L. Smith, "Notes on the Exegesis of John Wesley's *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 16 (Spring, 1981):110-112.

²⁰The remarkable faithfulness with which the leaders of the nineteenth-century holiness movement and the founders and early theologians of the Church of the Nazarene followed the teachings of Wesley and Fletcher on the indivisible relationship between the process of growth in holiness and two sanctifying moments of grace, one called "initial" and the other, inwardly, "entire," will appear clearly in the collection of nineteenth-century popular holiness classics that I am now preparing, forthcoming at the Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, Missouri.

