

Sweet River Church

*We feel our group is theologically unique because of two distinctive doctrines
All commentary on this page is from Pastor. Rev. Tony Gibson*

Two Distinctive Doctrines

Many people are searching for a Church whose worship is passionate and spirit-filled. A place where the congregation comes alive in the presence of God. Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches are known for this kind of atmosphere to which we share a common bond. A place where God's rich presence is easily felt and welcomed through heartfelt worship. There's nothing more exciting than being in a room filled with passionate worshippers whose hands are lifted up without fear and doubting and whose voices create an Acts chapter 2 kind of atmosphere. (See our philosophy of worship on our website located at: <http://www.sweetriverchurch.org>)

At the same time many people today are searching for a Church where unlimited grace is taught and stressed often. Statistics show one of the greatest turn-offs for a seeker today is to be in a Church where grace is limited, redefined, or completely downplayed in the name of holiness. A steady diet of "ruling keeping" Christianity, (the perceived do's and don'ts of the faith), has historically produced nothing less than a toxic or hyper-spiritual group of believers who inevitably become, judgmental, controlling, and manipulative. What does all this mean? There are some hard-working, bible believing Christians out there who are doing such a good job working the Kingdom of God but for all the wrong reasons.

A grace-filled Church can, and does correct or redirect the good-works by those on the treadmill to heaven. Grace offers change to the believer beginning on the inside first and allows the outside to naturally take care of itself. In these cases the Kingdom of God will be sought and worked, but for entirely different reasons. There are many fine Evangelical Churches who do a good job offering true biblical grace, the kind where you feel right at home, accepted, and without feeling judged or condemned. We too share a common bond with that, and preach it often.

You must know however, both these dynamics are rooted in Christian doctrine to which we do not all agree. You must also know it does not take long to find a Church who stresses at least one of these two important points. But it is amazingly rare to find a Church who embraces both these specific points of doctrine all under the same roof. We here at Sweet River Church do exactly that. There are people in your neighborhood today

starving for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in their life, in a non-judgmental, non-toxic atmosphere. We've taken time on this website to expound our doctrine to some degree. Again, we want you to have doctrinal leverage over us and to know where we stand on these important views. Take your bible and reference these powerful passages with us. Sweet River Church takes the better of two worlds. Grace and Power.

Doctrine No. 1

We believe in The Baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is one of the most misunderstood views among evangelicals today ever, though they do not claim any misunderstanding. Allow me to walk you through our view to hopefully bring clarification.

Many evangelicals have complained how Pentecostal theology on the Baptism of the Spirit is at best, unpersuasive, and even borders on heresy. There is a point to be made here and I find myself agreeing at least in part.

Pentecostal theology (on this subject) has, in my opinion, offered unpersuasive and sloppy theology when attempting to connect the theological dots for evangelicals who are thirsty for more of the Holy Spirit.

However, to their discredit, many evangelicals will not entertain the idea, nor allow healthy discussion if it is not within the framework of their doctrine. I think both groups are guilty of not giving it a higher priority for discussion. I take time on this web site to offer our view here at Sweet River because I believe it is a needed discussion.

Many believe the Baptism of the Spirit is another way of describing a regenerating or new birth experience known as the indwelling of the Spirit. If that is true, I can surely see their point. The bible teaches how the Holy Spirit baptizes the believer into Christ, 1st. Cor. 12:13; Rom.6:3; Gal. 3:27.

Spiritually we become new creatures or regenerated beings, to which we are (spiritually) positioned into this universal body where Christ is the head, (Eph.1:22.) This justifying act is usually played out in Water Baptism but not to be confused with it of course.

But the baptism of the Spirit we are referring to is one where the Holy Spirit IS NOT the baptizer and Christ IS NOT the object to which we are spiritually placed or baptized. John the Baptist spoke of how Christ would come and baptize his own "in the Holy Spirit."

John 1:33. In this passage Jesus IS the baptizer and that's the point! To this point however, many go strangely quiet.

If Jesus is the Baptizer, He then would be spiritually baptizing the seeker into Himself for salvation. I know of no passage which will declare or confirm such a point. His baptism is a separate and distinct function or ministry with a completely different result. The words of John 1:33 (also Mt., Mk, Lu.) is repeated in Acts chapter 1:5 and clearly defined in Acts 1:8 as the reception of power, still pointing to the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2. Don't lose me here.

Here's the bottom line. At Pentecost Jesus became the baptizer who soaked=baptized, His born again Church in/with the Holy Spirit. But please understand however, the Holy Spirit came first to take up residence in their hearts (spirit) on resurrection day according to John 20:22, where Jesus commanded them to "receive the Holy Spirit." He then breathed on them in that moment and they became "born again." This same Holy Spirit (in a one time for all time moment) then (spiritually) soaked them into position with Christ in fulfillment of what the Apostle Paul would later write in 1st. Cor. 12:13. I

Some argue that the entire resurrection event in (Jn. 20 & Lu. 24) was only a foretaste of what was to fully come to pass at Pentecost just fifty days later. But how can you make this resurrection event a foretaste? Either the Holy Spirit was given and received, or He was not. It is true the Acts 2 event was something different than what happened on resurrection day, but it does not change the fact that they were indwelt as the Spirit was given to the body of Christ.

Jesus commanded them to receive Him, and the biblical evidence that He was received is in the fact that they now understood the scriptures. But in addition, there's nothing in the context which would lead to some kind of foretaste of the Spirit. The idea is either dishonest or simply a real stretch of theology. To say the John 20 reception of the Spirit was a foretaste MUST have some qualifying words pointing us to that conclusion, it does not.) It is true however; the manifestation of the Spirit was truly greater. But we're talking about two entirely different things.

In Luke chapter 24 (Luke's version of the same resurrection event) the giving and receiving of the Spirit is confirmed, (though Luke excludes the breathing experience), he shows the very result of a regenerating work of the Spirit when he narrates these words. "He opened their understanding that they might comprehend the scriptures" Lu.24:31, 32, 45.

They in that moment had a spiritual understanding of what had just taken place. Why? Because they were now born again. (See I Cor. 2:14, 15.)

These same Spirit-indwelt believers were then commanded in (Luke 24:49) to wait in Jerusalem for the "Promise of the Father." The promise of the Father? Wasn't the Promise of the Father the very indwelling presence of the Spirit which they had just received?

No!! Why? Allowing scripture to interpret scripture, the receiving of the Holy Spirit through Christ Breath on resurrection evening could not be the awaited Promise, for a few very good reasons. Lest the bible have an obvious contradiction. If the Promise Gift was the reception of the Spirit through new birth, (which is undeniably seen in Jn. 20,) why would Jesus then command them to wait in Jerusalem after breathing on them and commanding them to receive Him? Delay? Nonsense!! There is nothing in the context (of John 20) that would lead us to a conclusion of some kind of delay as some have concluded. (To understand these points you must use both John 20 and Luke 24 to get the whole picture.)

Logic will persuade any honest student of scripture to see how these believers received the Holy Spirit in (Jn.20) but then were immediately commanded to wait for the Promised Gift in (Lu.24.)

Here's the simple solution. The John 20 "Breath experience" was truly an "in-pouring"=indwelling, of the Spirit from heaven, fifty days before Pentecost, and a fulfillment of Jn.14:17, but the Promised Gift of The Spirit was NOT an in-pouring from heaven, but rather an "out-pouring" from within their hearts.

This nugget of truth is one of the most ignored or rejected bible proclamations ever! The outpoured Spirit is a direct fulfillment of Jesus own prophetic promise in John 7:37, 38, another ignored passage in light of this subject.

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. v38 He who believe in Me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." v39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

Jesus was prophetically pointing to the day of Pentecost by saying, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink... He's saying to us today, I will cause a River to flow from on the inside of you. This promised release (Gift) will give you (in the realm of the soul) my manifest presence and power. He couldn't do that for them until the Holy

Spirit was first given in new birth. So wants the Holy Spirit took up residence, He then could baptize or soak with a wonderful release from within.

Again, none of it could happen for them until the Holy Spirit was first given. But the Spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified. (Let me unravel this theological ball of confusion a little more. Pay close attention as I connect these theological dots.)

When was Jesus glorified? Some say He was glorified after His ascension in Act 1. But the bible says He entered His glory on resurrection day. See Lu. 24:26. His glory was not a place called heaven it was a sphere of immortality in a glorified body.

Others desperately argue how the Spirit could not have been given until the birth of the Church in Acts chapter 2. It is said, this is the day the Spirit was given. Jesus himself said He would not give the Spirit until He went away, referring to His ascension. See John 16:7. So Acts 2 is traditionally understood as not only the birth of the Church, but also a spiritual birth to each of the 120 believers there.

But an honest student of scripture after fitting all the pieces of the puzzle together cannot possibly arrive at such a conclusion. There was clearly more than one ascension scene found in the New Testament.

John's order of events was incredibly consistent and in chronological sequence. Back in John 20 Jesus appeared to Mary in a glorified body. He wouldn't allow her to touch Him. Why? Because He had not yet ascended! He said, "Go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending... "

Some argue He meant ascending in 40 days. Why make such a stretch? It is done only because many are interpreting John 20 from the standpoint of Acts chapter one. In other words, what happened in Acts chapter one defines what happened in John chapter 20, even though chronologically John 20 happened first. It should be the other way around. What happened on resurrection day should define and interpret what happened on the Day of Pentecost. But besides the hermeneutical problems, there are no qualifying words in the immediate context to allow such an interpretation. It's just an (unknowing) attempt to thwart John's sequence of events leading to the Day of Pentecost.

It's interesting to note however, later that evening when He breathed on them and commanded them to receive the Spirit He also invited them to touch Him. (Lu.24) Why not Mary that morning? I'm convinced Jesus did not want to be ceremonially defiled before taking His own blood to heaven and placing it on the mercy seat of God made

without hands. Once the blood of atonement was applied, there would be no need to delay the giving of the Spirit to all who believe. And as you can see in John 20, He didn't delay at all.

After He performed His High Priest duty resurrection morning, He then returned to all of His disciples including Mary that evening and invited them all to touch Him. He then gave the Holy Spirit. (It's only a side note, but interesting to me.)

Lastly on the same note, if the Acts chapter one ascension scene was the only ascension in view, why would Jesus tell His disciples they would see Him again after He ascended? "A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while and you will see Me, because I go to the Father." See John 16:16.

If the Acts chapter 1 ascension is the only one in view here, (which is important for making Pentecost a regenerating work), when did the disciples see Him again after the ascension? The answer is, never. They never physically saw Him again. The Apostle Paul known formally as Saul, saw Him after He ascended and only through a divine vision. Jesus has never returned from His Father's presence to this day. But of course we know He will soon.

I labor with this explanation because so many Charismatic ministries never bother to offer a thorough explanation of the Baptism of the Spirit. It isn't fair to Evangelicals who have a hard time getting a persuasive answer to their questions on this topic.

Connecting the dots: Allow me to run through this sequence of events once more and very quickly. The believers on resurrection Day became born again as the Spirit was given to all from that day forward. Why? Because Jesus in a glorified body (resurrection morning Jn.20) went to His Father and deposited His very own blood on the Mercy seat, according to His priestly duty found in (Lev. 4-6.) He then descended and showed Himself to them that very evening.

He declared "Peace" to them as He breathed on them and said "receive the Holy Spirit." For the very first time in the history of the world, the ability to have "peace WITH GOD, was accomplished. The disciples suddenly began to have a spiritual understanding as their spiritual "eyes were opened." They then were commanded to wait in the upper room for the Promise of the Father. They did not sit there praising God in one accord and prayer (as un-regenerated believes who had peace with God) as some would say. They waited for the outpoured Gift. What was the Promise?

It was a release of the Spirit from within their hearts. It was everything Jesus said it would be in John 7. It was a baptism which produced two things: Real Comfort equals Manifest Presence and Real Power. Comfort in that they now personally experienced His rich presence because of an internal fountain released from within them (onto their souls) and out of their mouth as this supernatural ability to speak languages never learned came upon them.

Prior to this day, only a Prophet, Priest, or King was able to experience the presence of God. But now everyone could come and drink from the rivers of living water. "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink..."

And secondly, Manifest Power, to go and fulfill the great commission to preach with boldness and to heal in His name.

Is it possible to be born again and not have the Gift of the Holy Spirit? Absolutely! It would be like receiving the regenerating work of the Spirit on resurrection evening, as Christ breathed on you, but then didn't stick around for Pentecost. The release from within never happened because you weren't there that day.

The good news is, the Day of Pentecost was repeated at various times throughout the book of Acts and today is repeated wherever there is faith to receive it. These patterns were given to the Church for good reason.

For many Church going Evangelicals however, to receive the Gift of the Spirit is an uphill climb with many theological road-blocks to overcome. Not to mention the obvious risk of becoming the object of ridicule for entertaining so-called heretical ideas.

But it is my experience, first hand, that there are many in the Evangelical world who desperately want more of the Holy Spirit poured out but can't seem to get there. This leads me again to why I spent so much time on this web site with this subject.

There it is. That's our view. Have you received the Gift of the Holy Spirit since you first believed in Jesus? What is the evidence of that reception? Do you want His gift? Do you thirst for Him enough to ask? See Luke 11:13. We love to talk about the Holy Spirit at Sweet River Church. Come join in with us.

Doctrine No. 2

We believe in **The Doctrine of Eternal Security**. The Doctrine of Eternal Security is a much needed teaching among all who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is part of a larger theology originally introduced by the earliest protestant reformers and today taught by many evangelical groups.

Unfortunately however, the theological tide has turned over the years. Many groups within the protestant view have knowingly, or un-knowingly, abandoned the vision of the earliest reformers on this one specific point of theology for sure.

Hundreds of reformers over the years carried the mantel of free grace to the entire world, but not all. Some imposed variations of that revelation and ran with it in the name of Protestantism. It is a historical fact that Martin Luther's successor altered some of Luther's points of theology on salvation after his death.

My point is, today some have actually returned to a Catholic view of Salvation packaged in a Protestant vernacular.

In other words, how one is saved from sin and hell unto righteousness and heaven, and how one remains saved in this present world, is zealously preached for sure. Sincere men and women of God are using all the favorite protestant buzz words like "free-grace, grace alone, Gift... "Etc. but are actually preaching a "variation form" of the earliest protestant message. That variation in my view is actually a return to Catholicism, at least at a core level.

Many, who embrace Christianity from the standpoint of protestant tradition, have at first glance a biblical view of New Testament grace but in essence share an undeniable Catholic legalism which has now permeated many protestant denominations and independent groups. And that's my point.

Please understand my heart. I'm certainly not trying to be divisive or seemingly trying to pick a fight with the body of Christ on this issue or the last. But it is my first-hand experience that many today will never return to their home-Church, not because the world has so much more to offer them, but because they have felt the death-dealing blow of toxic legalism at Church. There is no joy in it!!

Over the years I have met many people who criticize Christianity, not because they have a problem with Christ, but rather have a distorted view of salvation and its freeness.

They know full well they can never live up to a set of rules for any length of time. In some cases, people have been spiritually abused by fear tactics and manipulation, lest they find themselves in hell.

I offer no argument on the existence of hell, it does exist. The argument is whether or not one who believes in Christ might find themselves in hell because at some level they fell short.

The idea that one can lose the gift of eternal life finds its roots in Catholic theology and sadly preached from many Protestant pulpits today. I say this hoping to raise evangelical eyebrows to a serious and growing problem in the Church. The loss of biblical grace.

If we claim to embrace the Spirit of Reformation, then let us begin with its' very root- foundation first. That foundation has been abandoned, or in some cases never embraced in the first place by some well meaning friends within our ranks.

I'm convinced the Spirit of the Protestant Reformation was, and is, truly a divine move of God in a dark time when the Catholic Church was, and is, in great spiritual bondage. But like all divine moves, not everyone catches the wind of the Spirit or remains in the gust of that wind. As time goes on, people choose to be Protestant for completely different reasons than that which motivated its earliest converts.

Eternal Security is just one of those great pillars of freedom in Christ which has slowly lost its effectiveness by the plight of false teaching among us Protestants.

Biblical Grace is the key to absolute contentment and freedom in Christ, and the Doctrine of Eternal Security is one of its theologies. I won't take time here to expound on the subject in the same way I did with the Gift of The Spirit. The subject is simply too exhaustive for this web site.

But if you would like to know more about our earliest reformers like Martin Luther or John Calvin, please do not hesitate to contact us from our home page directory. We would be more than happy to go verse by verse with you so you might better understand the very foundation of your protestant heritage.

Today we don't use the word "Protestant" much because it sounds so divisive. And actually I almost never use the word. But most people haven't a clue as to what was actually behind the word and what they "rediscovered" in that 16th century. Most have no idea how those earliest reformers were so persecuted and held in contempt for

promoting a free gospel, namely, Grace alone. The Protestant Reformation (for those readers who are Catholic and who have never heard it,) was a return to biblical and historic Christianity from the plight Church tradition which did not reflect the earliest Apostles.

The comments made concerning the Catholic view of Salvation are by no means intended to insult or degrade anyone of the Catholic faith. We simply agree to disagree on this ever important foundational subject.

We do however affirm and celebrate the earliest protesting reformers who revolted against an anti-biblical view, namely, the ability to lose the gift of eternal life.

The earliest Reformers resisted the teaching that salvation could be lost, and marched on with a "rediscovered" God-send revelation that salvation was totally free and called the Gift of God, (by grace alone through faith.) They set in motion a spiritual freedom which has for centuries now allowed millions, even billions of Christians to enjoy and experience.

When Protestant Evangelicals abandon the earliest reformers, (on this vital subject) they, in essence, abandon the very foundational reason why there was a Protestant Reformation in the first place.

You must know however, the Roman Catholic Church was not the first to define salvation in terms other than grace alone. You can find this theme in the New Testament. The Apostle's of Acts chapter 15 are found defending against those who insisted on a Justification through keeping the law plus grace.

The Apostles however, exposed this law-keeping kind of Christianity which had developed in their midst. It was deemed a false teaching and a "look-alike" variation to their message.

To believe Jesus is the Christ and to receive Him as savior, by faith alone, was then and today, the only prescription for justification and eternal life. This one time exchange is irreversible, and has eternal benefits. There's so much more to be said on this subject.

Those of us at Sweet River Church acknowledge and cherish our reformation roots and we thank God for those who suffered persecution to bring them to us.