

Empowered by the Spirit

Room for Differing Views

An Annotation to the Sovereign Grace Ministries Statement of Faith

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In 2002, a section in the Sovereign Grace Ministries Statement of Faith was modified—specifically, the section on the role of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life. Formerly titled “The Baptism of the Spirit,” the new section is titled “Empowered by the Spirit.” The modified section reads as follows:

Empowered by the Spirit

In addition to effecting regeneration and sanctification, the Holy Spirit also empowers believers for Christian witness and service. While all genuine believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit at conversion, the New Testament indicates the importance of an ongoing, empowering work of the Spirit subsequent to conversion as well. Being indwelt by the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit are theologically distinct experiences. The Holy Spirit desires to fill each believer continually with increased power for Christian life and witness, and imparts his supernatural gifts for the edification of the Body and for various works

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of ministry in the world. All the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the church of the first century are available today, are vital for the mission of the church, and are to be earnestly desired and practiced.

For most of us, this modification comes as no surprise. However, there may be some who view this as a major modification or doctrinal shift; others might infer a downgrade in the rigor of our commitment to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This brief annotation will seek to set the modification of our Statement of Faith in context, explain the substance of the new section, highlight the salutary effects of the change, and allay any potential concerns of pneumatological erosion.

The Context of the Modification

Let it first be said that the Sovereign Grace Ministries leadership team has not moved from its understanding of the work of the Spirit, an understanding that could be classified as a traditional charismatic/Pentecostal view.¹ However, as our family of churches has grown, an increasing number of people have been drawn to Sovereign Grace's combined emphases of sound doctrine and charismatic experience. Many of these people come from backgrounds or contexts that are theologically Reformed; what they have encountered in Sovereign Grace is a somewhat unusual combination of the key elements of their own theological heritage with a robust doctrine of the Spirit and a corresponding pursuit of the ministry of the Spirit. It has been both humbling and encouraging to see the enthusiasm of so many over their experience with Sovereign Grace churches.

As our history with such people has grown, we have increasingly found that our common ground far exceeds our differences. For a number who share our commitment to the centrality of the gospel, our Reformed soteriology, our pursuit of the active presence of God, and our belief in ongoing ministry of the Spirit (including the continuation of spiritual gifts), Sovereign Grace has become a congenial context in which fruitful participation can flourish. Many of these people have experienced what they would under-

stand as the baptism in the Holy Spirit. For them, this has been an introduction into a fundamentally different, more dynamic relationship with God. However, for some who have come to a Sovereign Grace context and experienced an enriched experience of God, a few residual theological differences remain, primarily one. It is this difference that has prompted the modification of our Statement of Faith.

This remaining theological difference involves one's understanding of the empowering work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. Again, the common ground is extensive. Together, we acknowledge the empowering work of the Spirit, relish the active presence of God, daily seek the ongoing filling of the Spirit, and actively pursue the gifts of the Spirit. The difference for some is how they view one's introduction into the experience of the Spirit. These individuals would understand the phrase "baptism in the Spirit" to refer to what happens to a believer at conversion: when he is born again, he receives the gift of the Holy Spirit in keeping with the promises of the new covenant.² Of course, the historic—and present—position of the Sovereign Grace team has been that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is an experience distinct from conversion (though not necessarily *temporally* separate from conversion) in which the Spirit comes upon a believer to empower him for Christian life and service. When extensive common ground exists, such as that described above, the Sovereign Grace leadership team has found in many cases that the primary difference amounts to a matter of terminology regarding one's inaugural experience with the Holy Spirit. In such instances, we would consider that difference in terminology to be of secondary importance.³

So, while the Sovereign Grace team has not shifted from its view of the work of the Spirit, it has decided to welcome those who hold a "third wave" view of the Spirit's work—as long as certain fundamental values about the work of the Spirit are held in common. It is these common values that the modified statement expresses and emphasizes.

The Substance of the Modification

In essence, we have produced a statement designed to find agreement among those with a charismatic/Pentecostal perspective and among those holding a third wave viewpoint. The following points characterize the modified statement:

- The statement *does not require* one to hold to a baptism in the Spirit distinct from conversion.
- The statement certainly *does not exclude* such a distinct baptism in the Spirit.
- The statement simply *declines to specify* what a second experience of the Spirit (i.e., an experience apart from conversion) should be called.
- The statement *makes clear which values are central* and should be held, whatever terminology one uses to describe a second work of the Spirit. As such, the statement contemplates a particular kind of lifestyle and experience: one marked by the Spirit's presence and power.⁴

This does not mean that any and all who hold to either of these positions would find a Sovereign Grace context consistent with their viewpoints. For example, one can imagine a more traditional Pentecostal whose attitude is “Don’t tell me about the Holy Spirit—I was baptized in the Spirit 20 years ago! It’s those other people who need the Spirit.” This is obviously a caricature, but it illustrates a misapplication of the charismatic/Pentecostal view in which pride exists because of a past experience, and the ongoing necessity of the Spirit’s work—repeated fillings of the Spirit for empowerment—are ignored. On the other hand, one can also imagine a “third waver” who says, “Don’t tell me I need the Spirit—I got all I needed at conversion!” This caricature illustrates a similar misapplication of a faithful third wave view in which the necessity for the ongoing work of the Spirit is ignored, and confidence is placed in a past experience—in this case, conversion.

A full exposition of the modified paragraph is beyond the scope of this paper, but the statement includes the following salient points:

1. “In addition to effecting regeneration and sanctification . . .” The statement makes an important acknowledgement of **broader aspects** of the Spirit’s work. We never want the miraculous nature of regeneration and sanctification to be overshadowed by an undue emphasis on other and more apparently “spectacular” aspects of the Spirit’s work such as spiritual gifts.
2. “While all genuine believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit at conversion . . .” The statement acknowledges the **indwelling** of the Spirit in all believers.
3. “. . . the New Testament indicates the importance of an ongoing, empowering work of the Spirit subsequent to conversion as well.” The **empowering** nature of the Spirit’s work in a believer’s life is emphasized.
4. “Being indwelt by the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit are theologically distinct experiences.” The statement makes a **distinction** between the indwelling of the Spirit at conversion and the subsequent empowering work of the Spirit in the believer’s life. These are described as “theologically distinct” experiences; clearly, a subsequent filling of the Spirit that directly results in, say, bold proclamation of the gospel (cf. Ac 4:8, 13:9) differs in certain fundamental ways from what one experiences at the new birth.
5. “The Holy Spirit desires to fill each believer continually with increased power . . .” The statement emphasizes the necessity of the **ongoing** nature of the Spirit’s work, including continual and repeated fillings of the Spirit (cf. Eph 5:18). While one’s theological framework is important, we are nonetheless more concerned that second, third, fourth, fifth . . . sixtieth . . . (etc.) encounters with the Spirit *actually occur* than we are with what one should call a second encounter with the Spirit (either a “baptism” or a “subsequent filling”).

6. “. . . with increased power for Christian life and witness.” This phrase emphasizes the **ethical aspects** of the Spirit’s empowerment.
7. “[The Holy Spirit] imparts his supernatural gifts for the edification of the Body and for various works of ministry in the world.” The statement highlights the **purposes** of spiritual gifts in edifying the church and furthering the ministry of the gospel (as opposed to being merely a source of personal blessing or experience).
8. “All the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the church of the first-century are available today . . .” The continuity and importance of **the full range of spiritual gifts** presented in Scripture is insisted upon.
9. “[Spiritual gifts] are vital for the mission of the church, and are to be earnestly desired and practiced.” Beyond mere doctrinal acknowledgment, the paragraph communicates an attitude: believers are to desire and pursue the work of the Spirit. This is perhaps as important as certain creedal affirmations concerning the Spirit’s work.

These points articulate the main beliefs and values concerning the Spirit’s empowering work that we feel are most important for participation within a Sovereign Grace context. When these beliefs and values are held, latitude on other issues may be allowed.

Because the charismatic/Pentecostal viewpoint has been our position historically, these values are particularly important gauges for those exploring involvement in Sovereign Grace who hold a third wave view. A degree of precision is important here. As with most doctrines, those who hold to a third wave view represent a spectrum of beliefs, attitudes, and practices. Indeed, in this particular area of doctrine the categories of “attitude” and “practice” are especially important. The modified Statement of Faith would not necessarily embrace any and all who hold to a third wave view, but those holding to what the writer would call a “robust third wave view” (or, better, a “robust continuationist view”). Such a

view would comprise the values articulated above: a passion for the Spirit's presence and activity, a pursuit of the gifts, a faith-filled expectation of God's gracious granting of the gifts, an expectation of conversions that exhibit more than simply profession but which are accompanied by encounters with God's Spirit that seem to be in keeping with the momentous nature of conversion under the new covenant, etc. It is these things, which historically have marked the lives of so many in the Pentecostal and charismatic camps, that we want to preserve. The modified statement simply accommodates those who desire these same things, but who view them as constitutive of the power of the new birth in the new covenant age.⁵

Our attempt has been to craft a statement that is biblically faithful, that emphasizes our particular values, and that could be agreed upon by both a traditional Pentecostal and a "third waver." This is certainly possible with this statement as long as one does not insist on specificity with regards to what one calls a second experience with the Spirit, be it a "baptism in the Spirit" or a subsequent filling of the Spirit.

Is this Practical?

This statement is an attempt to allow for common association where sufficient agreement on doctrine and practice exists, and to draw appropriate lines of demarcation so as to preserve doctrinal integrity. Of course, practically implementing this statement will in many cases require wisdom and care.

At the local-church level, individual pastoral teams actually have to *teach* on the work of the Spirit, and it is probably wise—though not necessarily imperative—to teach one particular viewpoint. However, in so doing, the viewpoint that is taught could be qualified to allow for differing viewpoints *within a framework of commonly held values* and, of course, with the irreducible minimum of humility towards our own beliefs and the beliefs of others.

We have seen this approach function well at Covenant Life Church, where there are actually differing views on the pastoral team itself. The majority of the team holds to a traditional charis-

matic/Pentecostal view, but there are four pastors who have a third wave perspective.⁶ In settings where the work of the Spirit is taught (e.g., the New Members class), the majority view is presented. Pastors who hold to a different view are supportive of the majority position—i.e., they recognize it as a legitimate position biblically and, while not personally persuaded by it, are comfortable deferring on the issue and having it taught. This obviously requires some degree of humility and commitment to the team as a whole. The majority also expresses humility through the accommodation of other views. Moreover, even when the majority view is taught, care is taken to place the greatest emphasis on the values common to both views. These principles would apply to members as well: if a prospective member held a third wave view, enthusiastically embraced our common values, and was willing to support the church's teaching and not make this difference into a point of controversy, we would gladly welcome him or her as a member of the church.

As an example of how we have sought to apply this at Covenant Life Church, there is attached to this paper a lesson from Covenant Life's newly revised new members class (Lesson 7, "Strength for the Journey: Empowered by the Spirit"). Under Roman numeral IV, sections A and B outline a charismatic/Pentecostal view of the Spirit's work. Section C notes our accommodation of other views, and articulates the common values that should be held by all members.

Our experience at Covenant Life gives us confidence that the broadening of this statement is indeed practicable. **In the case of a single staff pastor:** clearly, he would teach his own view of this subject, allowing for other views among his members assuming that our core values are shared and the matter will not become a point of contention. **In the case of a pastoral team:** the team would teach the majority view, while allowing latitude for the minority view (again, assuming the key values are shared). In such a case, humility is required on the part of the majority of the pastoral team to allow for different positions that are nonetheless consonant with our values. In addition, the majority should display biblical discernment through its greater emphasis on the essential values that unite us, rather than an insistence on conformity to all aspects of the majority view.

For team members in the minority, humility requires that they be supportive of the majority position (though not holding to it personally), deferring to the team as a whole on this issue. Ministry settings will be governed by the majority view; minority members should be able to participate fully and to do so in faith, being careful not to introduce confusion by the display of disagreement. When our essential values are held in common, it has been our experience that all members of the team pray with equal faith, display equal expectancy of the Spirit's ministry, equally direct the attention of the person receiving ministry outward and upward to the Savior, and equally trust in the sovereignty of God in his care for his people.

A Way Forward

One might wonder if this accommodation will result in doctrinal degradation. While doctrinal latitude can lead to doctrinal indifference, it does not do so *necessarily*. What is required in such matters is absolute clarity on essentials and biblical discernment on non-essentials. Such discernment must include thoughtful consideration as to the entailments of having a spectrum of views on a particular subject. The modified statement does introduce a spectrum, but it is a limited one; not all views on the Spirit are accommodated, and those that are must be held within a common theological framework and set of commonly held values. For example, our statement would not accommodate a cessationist perspective on spiritual gifts. Although we love, respect, and affirm genuine brothers and sisters in Christ who are cessationists, the entailments of this view for life, ministry, and practice within the context of the local church would simply make laboring closely together in the context of a local church impracticable.

It is our belief that the framework set forth above and the values we seek to preserve within Sovereign Grace are sufficiently clear and rigorous to preserve *functional unity*. Moreover, they are sufficiently broad to allow for association between those with the requisite doctrinal uniformity. In short, the modified statement establishes a framework within which acceptable diversity on this

issue is identified and allowed while clear biblical values and robust spiritual experience are preserved for future generations.

Hope for the future is fueled by the presence of another value that is cherished within Sovereign Grace: humility. Whenever doctrinal specificity and definition are valued and sought, humility is critical. Humility protects us from wrong-headed dogmatism, doctrinal intransigence, and arrogant condescension. It is our hope that as we pursue together a vibrant experience of God through the ministry of the Spirit, we will do so humbly, and in so doing we will maintain both doctrinal fidelity and an increasing unity with those who love God's word and his active presence.

Endnotes

1. The addition of "charismatic" to this label implies some distinction from a traditional Pentecostal view. The primary distinction would be the lack of insistence that the gift of tongues is the necessary evidence that a person has been baptized in the Holy Spirit, an insistence that characterizes the doctrinal statements of many Pentecostal denominations. The general perspective of the Sovereign Grace leadership team is represented by the essay by Douglas Oss in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, ed. Wayne Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 239-283.
2. A common label for such a view, when coupled with a belief in the ongoing work of the Spirit and the continuity of spiritual gifts, is "third wave." Since that term is perhaps the most recognizable one in this discussion, it will be used throughout this paper. Another term that is sometimes used for this view is "continuationist," a term that actually seems preferable to "third wave" since its surface meaning is descriptive of specific aspects of this view.
3. This is not to deny that there are not larger theological structures involved in one's view on this issue, nor that those theological structures have no bearing on one's actual practice. It is, however, to affirm that such differences ultimately prove to be of secondary importance in light of the vast areas of agreement described above. Issues of practical application will be addressed later in this paper. In any event, it should be noted that there are Sovereign Grace pastors who hold to a third wave view and who function very comfortably within our family of churches.

4. Such an experience of the Spirit is clearly the expectation of those who hold to a charismatic/Pentecostal view; within Sovereign Grace, a third wave view would need to be formulated in such a way as to carry this same expectation.
5. This is an important point for formulating what has been called in this paper a “robust third wave view.” Such a view does not downgrade the Spirit’s empowering work by relegating it all under the vague heading of “conversion,” an error of which some third wave formulations are guilty. Rather, it recognizes the epochal change that occurred at Pentecost and thus the significance of the new birth *under the new covenant*, an experience that brings a far greater measure of the Spirit’s presence and power than was available under the old covenant.
6. In the interests of proper disclosure, the writer would be included among these four.

Appendix

Strength for the Journey Empowered by the Spirit Covenant Life Church New Members Class Lesson 7

In previous lessons, we've seen over and over our dependence upon the grace of God in the Christian life. The very plan of salvation is the story of God's gracious initiative to send His son to die on the cross for sinners who were as yet in rebellion against God. Having responded to the gospel, Christians then learn that their response was actually rooted in God's gracious choosing and calling of them before the foundation of the earth. In the fight for holiness, we find that all our efforts have their start in the sanctifying work of God, who "works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). The Christian life is truly "all of grace, from first to last."

Because of this, God never intended believers merely to "trudge on" in their own strength. Indeed, one of the great promises of Scripture comes at the very end of the book of Matthew, just after the giving of the Great Commission: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). In this lesson, we will explore more fully the source of strength for the Christian journey: the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

I. The Holy Spirit: God's Active Presence

- A. While God is omnipresent (present at all places at all times with all of His being), He makes His presence known in different ways for different purposes.
 - He can be present to bless, to sustain, to punish, or to empower.
- B. God manifested His presence in various ways throughout history, but these reached a climax in the person of Jesus Christ.

John 1:1, 14: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

- C. In the church age, God’s presence is primarily manifested in the world, and especially in the church, in the person of the Holy Spirit.

John 14:16-18: *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”*

“The work of the Holy Spirit is to manifest the active presence of God in the world, and especially in the church.”
(Wayne Grudem)

- D. Christians have the great privilege, not only of trusting in God’s omnipresence, but of personally experiencing His nearness.

Romans 8:15-16: *“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God . . .”*

James 4:8: *“Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.”*

- E. God’s active presence among His people accomplishes many things. It is not uncommon to focus narrowly on more dramatic aspects of this, such as miracles, healings, or prophecy. Scripture, however, portrays the Spirit’s work as pervasive and multifaceted—what might be called “the broad work of the Spirit.” To fully appreciate God’s active presence, we need to recognize the countless ways in which the Spirit is at work in and among us.

“. . . the Spirit’s major role in Paul’s view of things lies with his being *the absolutely essential constituent of the whole of Christian life*, from beginning to end. The Spirit thus empowers ethical life in all of its dimensions—personal, corporate, and in the world. Believers in Christ, who for Paul are “Spirit people” first and foremost, are variously described as living by the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, and sowing to the Spirit. . . . the Spirit conforms the believer into the likeness of Christ to the glory of God. The Spirit is therefore the empowering presence of God for living the life of God in the present.” (Gordon Fee)

II. The Holy Spirit: God’s Saving Presence

- A. The New Birth. The greatest miracle one can ever experience is the miracle of regeneration, in which the Holy Spirit changes our nature and imparts spiritual life to us. Nothing can ever compare with this mighty work of the Spirit in our lives.

Titus 3:4-7: “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

III. The Holy Spirit: God’s Purifying Presence

- A. The Holy Spirit. One of the Spirit’s primary activities is to remove sin from our lives and to make us more and more holy, just as God Himself is holy.

2 Corinthians 3:18: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

B. The Fruit of the Spirit. As the believer cooperates with the work of the Spirit in his life, the Spirit produces “fruit” in his life, consisting of godly attitudes and behavior. This supernatural work is the opposite of our natural tendencies, and is the reproduction of the life of Christ in the believer.

Galatians 5:16, 22-23: “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. . . . But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

IV. The Holy Spirit: God’s Empowering Presence

In addition to effecting regeneration and sanctification, the Holy Spirit also empowers believers for Christian witness and service. The inaugural experience of this empowering work is what the Scriptures call the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

- A. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is the experience in which the believer is immersed in the Holy Spirit by the risen Christ, resulting in an increased awareness of God and empowerment for life and service.
- I. This baptism was foretold by John the Baptist in each of the four gospels (Matt. 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, and John 1:33), and was also foretold by Jesus. It is “the promise of the Father”: God’s empowering presence for believers in the new covenant age.

Acts 1:4-5, 8: “And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”. . . But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

2. This experience is distinct from regeneration and occurs when the Holy Spirit comes upon a believer and fills him. In other words, we believe that every Christian is *indwelt* by the Holy Spirit at conversion. However, baptism in the Spirit, which is freely available to all believers, is a theologically distinct event that empowers us for mission (although it may well occur at the time of conversion).

Acts 8:12-17: "But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit."

3. The purpose of the experience is to enable the believer to bear witness concerning the gospel and serve the Lord with spiritual power.

Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

4. How do we receive the baptism in the Spirit, or know if we have received it?
 - a. We receive the baptism in the Spirit by asking God in faith, knowing that He loves to give good gifts to His children.

Luke 11:13: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

- b. This need not necessarily come at a time later than conversion.

Acts 10:44-47: "While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?""

"Thus, the "ideal" paradigm for New Testament faith was for the new convert also to be baptized in the Holy Spirit at the very commencement of his or her Christian life." (Douglas Oss)

- c. It would appear from the book of Acts that speaking in tongues is a common evidence of receiving this baptism, but it is not a necessary evidence, and it's not the only evidence. Although speaking in tongues is a biblical experience that Christians should pursue (1 Cor. 14:1, 5), baptism in the Spirit is not primarily about speaking in tongues or personal experience, but about receiving power from God that we might be more effective in accomplishing His purposes.
- d. A powerful effect of the baptism in the Spirit is the experience of the active presence of God. More than mere belief, the Spirit graciously gives us an overwhelming experience of the majesty and truth of God as revealed in Christ.

- B. Although a significant, identifiable, and often a dramatic event, baptism in the Spirit is only the *beginning* of a process of empowerment that God desires for every believer.

1. The New Testament envisions not simply one definitive experience of Spirit *baptism*, but rather a process of repeated, continual *fillings* of God's Spirit. A Christian may have been *indwelt* by the Spirit at conversion, and *baptized* in the Spirit, but yet not be presently *filled* with the Spirit.

Acts 4:8, 31: "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them . . . And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."

2. The Holy Spirit desires to fill each believer continually with increased power for Christian life and witness. Our responsibility and privilege is to live a life of dependence upon God, asking for His Spirit to continually fill us, to empower us, and to strengthen us to live lives for His glory.

Ephesians. 5:18: "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit . . ."

"Being continually filled with the Spirit is, in fact, the challenge of a lifetime and the challenge of each new day." (Anthony Hoekema)

- C. While Covenant Life identifies with and teaches this view of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, we recognize that some Christians do not hold to the doctrine of the baptism in the Spirit as an experience distinct from conversion. We desire, and have found it to be possible, to accommodate believers who have a differing view on this issue but who nonetheless share with us many beliefs and values concerning the Spirit's ministry. Those common values that we feel would be most important would include:

- A recognition of the need for ongoing empowerment by

the Spirit in the Christian life.

- A belief that Christians are to seek to be continually filled by the Spirit.
- A belief in the continuity of the spiritual gifts listed in Scripture, and an earnest desire for whatever gifts the Spirit would graciously give.
- A love for, and pursuit of, the active presence of God.

It has been our experience that, if these values are held in common, a person can comfortably and fruitfully be a part of Covenant Life, even though they might not refer to an experience with the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion as the “baptism in the Holy Spirit.”

D. Spiritual Gifts

In addition to giving us increased boldness and effectiveness in witness (Acts 4:31), prompting worship and thanksgiving in our hearts (Eph 5:18-20; Acts 10:46), increasing our growth in godliness (2Co 3:18), and strengthening our relationship with other believers (Eph 5:18, 21), the Holy Spirit also imparts supernatural gifts for the edification of the church and for works of ministry in the world.

1. All believers have and receive spiritual gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:7: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

2. All of the gifts are supernatural. In Scripture, all of the gifts, from seemingly “natural” ones like mercy and serving to “supernatural” ones like healing, are all viewed as being from God and empowered by the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:7: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

3. All of the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the church of

the first-century are available today. Scripture suggests that the gifts are given to the church until Christ's return, and there is no indication anywhere in Scripture that any of the gifts were intended to pass away with the early church.

1 Corinthians 1:7-8: "so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

4. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are vital for the mission of the church and are to be earnestly desired and practiced.

1 Corinthians 14:1: "Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy."

5. The purpose of spiritual gifts is the glory of God and the edification of other believers.

1 Corinthians 10:31: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

1 Corinthians 12:7: "'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

V. Pursuing God's Empowering Presence

Because God invites us to draw near to Him (Heb. 4:16; Jas. 4:8) and commands us to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), we can have confidence that He will respond to our pursuit of Him.

- A. Diligently practice the spiritual disciplines, especially the study of God's word, prayer, and worship.
 1. Amazingly, God desires an intimate relationship with us, and the spiritual disciplines are means God has given us to commune with Him, receive His grace, and grow in

godliness.

“The Spiritual Disciplines then are also like channels of God’s transforming grace. As we place ourselves in them to seek communion with Christ, His grace flows to us and we are changed. That’s why the disciplines must become priority for us if we will be Godly.” (Donald Whitney)

2. The Bible is God’s self-revelation to man. In it we learn what God is like and how we are to respond to Him. There is no more important activity for the Christian than reading and meditating upon the word of God.
3. Prayer is communication with God. It is the lifting up of our hearts, thoughts, and desires to God. When we pray, we communicate with God, and He communicates with us. For our part, we communicate our gratitude, confess our sins, submit our wills, present our requests, and pour out our worship. We also listen, allowing God to give us divine perspective on our lives, search our hearts for sin, illumine our minds with His truth, encourage our souls with His promises, and assure us of His love through Christ.

B. Recognize the value of the corporate gathering of the church for experiencing a fresh infilling of the Spirit.

- While private devotions are crucial for the Christian life, God is pleased to reveal His active presence in corporate meetings in ways we don’t normally experience when we’re alone.
- “Conversely, it’s true that God will manifest His presence to you in congregational worship in ways you can never know even in the most glorious secret worship. That’s because you are not only a temple of God as an individual, but the Bible ways (and far more often) that Christians *collectively* are God’s temple. . . . God manifests

His presence in different ways to the “living stones” of His temple when they are gathered than He does to them when they are apart.”(Donald Whitney)

C. The Sunday Celebration

In the life of this church, nothing exceeds the importance of our Sunday morning corporate meetings. These times provide a context where we can worship God together, hear the word of God proclaimed and taught, and be built together in our mission as a church.

Each Sunday has three primary goals:

1. *To worship and glorify God.* There is no higher calling for the people of God than to worship and glorify Him together. Our Sunday meetings provide the opportunity to glorify God, to declare His perfections, to praise His name, and to adore Him together
2. *To receive from God.* Although the main purpose of corporate worship is the exaltation of God, worship is nonetheless a means by which we encounter God together and are refreshed by His presence, strengthened by His grace, encouraged by His promises, and transformed by His truth. These things occur both through our times of worshipping God through song and through the preaching of God’s word.
3. *To minister to one another.* Believers are given the privilege of caring for, encouraging, and building up each other. Each Sunday is an opportunity for us to minister to others through prayer, words of encouragement, prophesy, greeting, sharing of Scriptures, and a multitude of other ways.

D. Other Corporate Contexts

In Covenant Life, there are a variety of other gatherings that take place within various ministry spheres: Junior High/Senior High, the Crossroads ministry (singles, 18-25), the Cornerstone ministry (singles, 26 and over), and the Family Life ministry. Care groups also play a critical role in our life together as a church. Each of these contexts provides opportunities for us to experience God's active presence together as we seek Him through worship, the teaching and application of God's word, and fellowship with each other.

VI. God's Active Presence: Our Privilege and Need

As believers, we should never be satisfied with anything less than the nearness of God—His active presence. He has promised to draw near to us, and He empowers us by the Holy Spirit to glorify Him and serve Him more effectively as He accomplishes His purposes through the church. To be a Christian is to be marked by the presence of God, and how gracious He is to give us the Holy Spirit to empower us for our lives, our service to Him, and our life together as a church. How desperately we need this. And how wondrous it is that we can pursue this in faith, and do so together.