

Reinhard Bonnke: Why Americans Take the Holy Spirit For Granted

Many believers in the United States think the Holy Spirit's power is an option. Christians in Africa – where miracles are frequent – don't have that attitude.

AFRICA SHALL BE SAVED." I heard God's message so clearly. In response my family moved from Lesotho to South Africa in 1974. But how was Africa going to be saved? Clueless, I sat with my head in my hands. As unknowns, we moved out into the unknown, with no prospects mapped out for us, hoping for further instruction from the Lord.

And sure enough, God spoke again. I was to rent the National Stadium in Gaborone, Botswana, for a gospel crusade. The only group willing to work with us was a church of 40 members.

I walked through the little city, not knowing how to put the loose ends together, and made a provisional booking for the stadium by faith. It was the right move.

To my disappointment the campaign began with only 100 people in attendance but then God entered the field. Before I had prayed for the sick or said anything at all about healing, my sermon was interrupted by dramatic healings. It was as if Jesus just could not wait to do His wonders! He was "itching" to start.

As a missionary I knew what it was like to preach to no more than five people at a time, but now I had 10,000 of them, with many receiving salvation and many being healed. As the news spread, the stadium filled up and the miracles of salvation and healing multiplied.

Then came another impulse from heaven: "Pray for converts to be baptized in the Holy Spirit!"

Where I come from, doing such a thing would be considered taboo-particularly in a stadium. But with my heart in my throat, I obeyed the voice of the Holy Spirit. The result almost knocked me off my feet. A vast roar of praise rose to God in "other tongues" as on the Day of Pentecost.

For me, that holy hubbub became a trumpet call announcing that this was what God wanted, to let His Spirit loose, and that I was never to feel embarrassed about anything He did. That day the ministry of Christ for All Nations was born.

Under that banner a river of Holy Spirit power has attended us. Tens of millions are turning to Christ and untold multitudes are being healed.

As a result, after years during which propaganda was spread that incited hatred in Africa, a God-ward mass movement is gaining momentum across that continent and in other places around the globe. Pentecostals and charismatics now account for one in every 10 people.

The Gift of the Spirit

For 1,500 years Bible standards and beliefs have laid the foundations of life in Europe and America. But that faith has an inner dynamic-namely, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Christ challenged His followers: "'What are you doing more than others?'" (Matt. 5:47, NIV). Why should He expect us to do more than others? Because that is what He had planned. His work, death and resurrection completed a power circuit between Earth and heaven that relied on a new source of life and change: the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, "'Ask, and it will be given to you'" (Luke 11:9, NKJV). However, He was talking about a specific request: "'If

you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13).

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is not an option; it is essential for authentic Christianity. Unfortunately, over the centuries the Holy Spirit became little more than a vague, mystical figure referred to in the creed; Holy Spirit truth was replaced with grace truth.

But Christ's command to ask for the Holy Spirit must be followed if we are to live the lives He intended for us. The Sermon on the Mount and the Great Commission set goals that would be impossible to reach were it not for the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

The apostle Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). David had said, "'By my God I can leap over a wall'" (2 Sam. 22:30), but for Paul there was absolutely nothing that could not be achieved in Christ. Jesus made the Holy Spirit an urgent requirement but assured us that "'everyone who asks receives'" (Luke 11:10).

Astonishingly, while Jesus was on Earth nobody made this request. John the Baptist, who was "sent from God" (John 1:6) to announce Christ, said, "'He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire'" (Luke 3:16), but Jesus never did that. The Gospel of John explains: "Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not been glorified" (7:39, NIV).

Previously, God's Spirit had flitted here and there for special occasions, and prophets spoke when the Spirit moved them. For long periods there was no sign of the Spirit. Then Christ ascended to heaven, and the Spirit came for the dispensation of power.

What happened 2,000 years ago on the day of Pentecost happened for me when I was a mere child. As I called on God in a church

service, suddenly all heaven seemed to crowd into my small frame. Without realizing what I was doing, I began praising God in tongues I had never learned.

Soon after, in a prayer meeting conducted by my father, a force within me became stronger and stronger. I felt a powerful tingling in my hands and with it came an urge to touch a woman across the church hall. I crept over to her quietly, concerned about my father's disapproving frown. She was arthritic. I touched her, a jolt of divine life shook her, and she was healed.

I realized even at that young age that although the experience of Spirit baptism is unforgettable, imparting thrills is not God's purpose. The Holy Spirit enters human flesh and blood personally to confer divine potential on those who serve Him.

According to the Bible, the Holy Spirit indwells every born-again believer. "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His" (Rom. 8:9, NKJV). Jesus had said, "'He dwells with you and will be in you'" (John 14:17).

But the Holy Spirit does not take up residence in us for nothing. Jesus said that this baptism, or anointing, would empower Christians to be His witnesses (see Acts 1:8). It would give them not only the boldness to share their testimonies but also the evidence-signs and wonders- to back them up.

I know that for some Christianity is only a perfunctory, mechanical routine. Like the brilliance of old master paintings covered with layers of varnish, it loses its pristine color as layers of religiosity and formality are imposed on it.

But the Holy Spirit makes debates and arguments about miracles unnecessary because He does what people try to deny! Year after year, for weeks at a time, in the teeming multitudes of our campaigns God is at work.

We bulldoze vast acres of land to make room for people to stand. Torrents of people pour in and listen breathlessly to the gospel, responding to its call often by the hundreds of thousands. In one meeting more than 1.5 million gathered, with more than 1 million coming to Christ. It is beyond anything that has occurred in previous history. The explanation has to be God's Spirit.

Along with the conversions, many miracles occur. On one occasion, a mentally deranged man was brought to a campaign service. While I was preaching, he suddenly looked around, restored to his right mind, dementia gone, and asked in bewilderment where he was and why.

Then a pregnant mother came to a mass campaign. She carried in her womb an unborn baby who had been confirmed dead and was to be removed by surgery the next day. During the healing session she screamed-the infant had moved. She came forward to tell us. A healthy son was born a few hours later.

A few years ago a far more awesome healing occurred in Nigeria. I was preaching, and a man named Daniel was brought in and laid in an adjoining room. A medical doctor had certified him dead and a mortician had embalmed him.

Suddenly he began to breathe again! There were more than 10,000 people present to witness the miracle. Now a fit man, he visited the United States last year. Christianity began with power signs such as these and continues to spread as a result of them.

Physical Response to Supernatural Influence

The Holy Spirit has many operations beyond conversion. The baptism in the Spirit is an extension of His initial work in us. He overflows both body and spirit, physical and spiritual.

I recall driving alone in Africa one day and suddenly realizing that the vehicle I was in was full of God. I was

overwhelmed by glory and light, lost to what I was doing. The car went on, presumably driven by angel hands.

My 176-pound body seemed fragile under the weight of the presence of God as self-consciousness turned to God-consciousness. He helped me to understand how the Spirit can impact audiences even when they are so huge they stretch out of my sight. I saw that one man is nothing, but when God is with him, he is everything.

Scripture asks, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). Spirit baptism is more than a subjective belief. Onlookers in the days of the apostles saw the evidence of it (see Acts 8:18, for example).

Paul described the experience of the first Christians of Colosse as "being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance" (Col. 1:11, NIV). He added his own testimony, saying that his "struggle" for the gospel was "with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me" (Col. 1:29).

At times, signs of New Testament exuberance have been scorned as "enthusiasm"- in the sense of frantic possession by a supernatural force. But we have to acknowledge that baptism in the Spirit is physical as well as profoundly spiritual. Speaking in tongues, for example, is the ideal evidence and sign of God's physical indwelling.

For some, tongues are offensive. Human instinct protests against that kind of personal invasion. But God made us to be integrated into His being. Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Man, was the supreme example of the perfect man, God in the flesh. Scripture calls it a mystery; yet baptism in the Holy Spirit opens up heavenly mysteries.

We are warned not to despise the gifts of God. Anything God gives-including tongues-is a wonderful privilege to enjoy.

Holy Spirit baptism is not only a privilege but also the secret of the present world revival, the greatest expansion of the Christian faith since apostolic times. It is proof that the Lord is keeping His promise to “pour water on the thirsty land” (Is. 44:3).

Passing the Baton

These Christian leaders appeared on the cover of Charisma before they died. We still celebrate their legacy.

Kathryn Kuhlman (1907-1976) – Still the world’s most widely known female evangelist, she appeared on Charisma’s cover in 1975, our first year of publication. She disliked the term “faith healer,” but countless miracles were documented in her services. Through broadcasts of her meetings on CBS, she introduced millions of Americans to the Holy Spirit in a flamboyant style that was uniquely her own.

Catherine Marshall (1914-1983) – Prolific author and wife of a U.S. Senate chaplain, she introduced thousands of Presbyterians and other mainline Protestants to the baptism of the Spirit through *Something More* and other books. Her novel *Christy* sold millions and became a television series after her death.

David Du Plessis (1905-1987) – Known as the father of the modern charismatic movement, this South African preacher dedicated his life to building bridges between different denominations. “Mr. Pentecost” initiated efforts to unite Pentecostals, and the Assemblies of God asked him in 1962 to withdraw his credentials because of his coziness with Catholics. He is one of the few church leaders to appear on Charisma’s cover more than once, in 1978 and 1987.

Dennis Bennett (1917-1991) – This Episcopal priest was ousted from his California church after he experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit in 1959. But his infectious charismatic fervor spread quickly to his new parish, St. Luke’s Episcopal Church

in Seattle. After renewal spread from there, he and his wife, Rita, formed the Episcopal Charismatic Fellowship and co-authored several books including the 1971 classic, *The Holy Spirit and You*.

Jamie Buckingham (1932-1992) – An award-winning columnist for *Charisma* and editor of *Ministries Today* magazine, Buckingham was known as “the prophet with a pen.” A former Southern Baptist who spoke candidly about the dangers of religiosity, he planted a successful congregation in Melbourne, Florida, and helped unite the many independent charismatic churches founded during the 1970s and 1980s.

Demos Shakarian (1913-1993) An Armenian immigrant who was baptized in the Spirit as a teenager, he became a successful businessman in California and at one time owned one of the world’s largest private dairies. In 1951 he founded the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International, which introduced the gospel and the charismatic experience to millions of laypeople. It has since spread to 160 countries.

John Wimber (1934-1997) – He knew success in the music industry as a member of the Righteous Brothers and was converted to Christ in 1963. Wimber became well-known after teaching a controversial course on miracles at Fuller Seminary. In 1977 he established a fast growing charismatic church in Anaheim, California, which became the genesis of the Vineyard church movement.

John Osteen (1921-1999) – Originally a Southern Baptist, he was baptized in the Holy Spirit in 1958 and later founded an independent church in an abandoned feed store in Houston. Lakewood Church became one of the nation’s first megachurches under his watch. Pastored today by his son, Joel, Lakewood is one of the nation’s largest congregations, with some 30,000 weekly attendees.

Derek Prince (1915-2003) – Perhaps the best-known Bible

teacher in the modern charismatic movement, this dignified British gentleman offered sound instruction on Christian fundamentals, Bible prophecy and the prophetic role of Israel (where he lived several months a year). He also stirred controversy for his role in the Florida based shepherding movement, which he repudiated in 1983.

Kenneth Hagin Sr. (1917-2003) – This country preacher experienced healing at a young age and began his ministry in Texas, emphasizing the power of faith to cast out demons and heal the sick. He eventually founded the Rhema Bible Training Center near Tulsa, Oklahoma, and through its influence became known as the father of the “Word of Faith” movement. He appeared on the cover of Charisma twice, in 1981 and 1990.

Reinhard Bonnke *has conducted evangelistic campaigns all over the world, especially in Africa. Based in Orlando, Florida, he recently launched The Reinhard Bonnke School of Fire, a practical ministry training program. Find out more by logging on at .*