

The "Gift" of the Holy Spirit

by Barry O'Dell

To say that this has been a controversial topic would be a drastic understatement! As is the case with many Bible subjects, there are several views on the matter. The first time this phrase is used is in Acts 2:38. There are three other references to this *gift* in the book of Acts and an examination of all four clearly defines what it is.

Reference 1 – Acts 2:38. *"Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* Having just been asked by the audience, *"Men and brethren, what shall we do?"* Peter commanded repentance and baptism for the remission of sins and then he stated the promise of the *gift* of the Holy Spirit. Some say that the *gift* was the Holy Spirit Himself – that at baptism He begins to dwell within the Christian. Others believe the *gift* to be the salvation that comes when one repents of sin and is baptized. The entire context of Acts 2 must be considered in order to understand this promise. First, consider the miraculous ability given to the apostles as recorded in the first four verses. The Holy Spirit gave them the ability to *"speak with other tongues"* and the audience heard them speaking in their own dialects. The word for *language* (v. 6) and *tongue* (v. 8) is the Greek word for dialect (διαλεκτος) or "the tongue or language peculiar to any people". The events of that first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ were the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy from the Old Testament (Joel 2:28-32). The apostles were not drunk, rather God had *"poured out of His Spirit"* and given them this miraculous ability (v. 12-17). Second, Peter also mentioned that Jesus was *"approved of God among you by miracles and wonders, and signs which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know"* (v. 22). Third, Paul spoke to them about the resurrection of Christ from the dead in verses 25-32, which is miraculous. Fourth, Peter made mention of what the crowd was seeing and hearing,

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which was miraculous (v. 33). What were they seeing and hearing? The miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit that was given to the apostles (v. 5-13). This was the fulfillment of the promise Jesus made just prior to His ascension back to the Father as recorded in Luke 24:47-49. The *gift of the Holy Spirit* is nothing less than the miraculous. This point will be further verified later in the article from Acts 10-11.

Reference 2 – Acts 8:20. *"But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money."* The gospel had made it from Jerusalem to Samaria by the preaching of Philip (Acts 8:5). Both men and women obeyed the gospel by being baptized just like those in Acts 2 (Acts 8:12). A man by the name of Simon is singled out in Acts 8:13 because he obeyed, but also because of what followed his obedience. After Samaria's obedience Peter and John were sent *"that they might receive the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 8:15). According to the text it was *"through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given"* (Acts 8:18). Allowing the text to specify what the *gift of the Holy Spirit* is we read that Simon said, *"Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 8:18-19). What was Peter's response? Verse 20 is

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clear – the *gift of God* was the ability that the apostles alone had to pass on to others the Holy Spirit. The Samaritans had been baptized by Philip, but did not receive the Holy Spirit until an apostle laid his hands upon them. Philip was able to perform miracles and signs (Acts 8:13), but he did not have the ability to pass on those miraculous abilities. Only the apostles could do that and it is referred to as *the gift of God*. It was the miraculous.

References 3 and 4 – Acts 10:45 & 11:17. “*And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” “*Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I that I could withstand God?*” Acts 10:1-11:18 is the record of the conversion of the first Gentiles to Christ and the apostle Peter was the messenger. Acts 11:1-18 is the successive or orderly account of what happened (v. 4). Peter was commissioned by God to go to Caesarea to preach to Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:1-8). The Lord sent Peter a vision to show him that it was time to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10:9-18, 32-33). Listen to God’s word as it reveals what the *gift of the Holy Spirit* was: “*And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord,*

how that He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11:15-17)? If that were not clear enough, Acts 10 makes it even more so: “*While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 10:44-45). Verse 46 proceeds to define what the *gift* was that was poured out: “*For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.*” This is why Acts 11:17 states that the Gentiles received the *like* (same, equal) *gift* that the Jews had received as recorded in Acts 2, mentioned earlier in the article.

What is the gift of the Holy Spirit? When allowing the Bible to answer we know (1) it was not salvation and (2) it was not a personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit for the Christian at baptism. The *gift of the Holy Spirit* was miraculous ability given by God to the apostles (Acts 2), passed on by the laying on of the apostle’s hands (Acts 8), and the *gift* given to the Gentiles as evidence to the Jews that they were being “*granted repentance unto life*” (Acts 11:18).

The Importance of an Accurate Understanding of Scripture

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Since the Bible is the living word of the living God, as Christians we love it, we hunger for it, we desire to understand its meaning and how it applies to us today. The word of God is the only means by which God communicates His character and will to us today. Thus, it is only through a love for, a mediation upon, and a proper understanding of the word of God will we have an accurate knowledge of God that is necessary to be right before Him (2 Tim. 3:15-17; Eph. 6:17; cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-10; 14:37; Ps. 1:1-2; Jn. 8:31-32; 1 Jn. 2:2-4). Everything that we understand and know about the true and living God, we come to know through the inspired Scriptures. By looking at creation, the sun, the moon and stars, etc., we observe marvelous design, beauty and awesome power to create such things - so much so that Paul wrote that mankind is “*without excuse*” (Rom. 1:20). Truly “*the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handiwork*” (Ps. 19:1). However, without His written revelation, we wouldn’t know if one “god” made the universe or a dozen “gods” did it. We stand in awe as did David at the fact that the God of the universe is “*mindful*” of mankind (Ps. 8:4). The infinite God desires to be intimate and close with the finite and thus He has spoken to us (Ps. 139). If we are to know the truth of who God is, what He has done, and what He desires, we

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must read and understand His infallible book because that is where He has chosen to reveal Himself. The true God in *“these last days hath spoken to us through His Son”* (Heb. 1:2). Jesus gave His apostles His word (Jn. 17:6) and they were miraculously guided by the Holy Spirit as they wrote the infallible sacred Scriptures which we call the Bible (Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 14:37; Gal. 1:11-12; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). In a world full of people who think Christ and the Church are unimportant and who think that one “view” is “just as good as another;” **why is it so important that we have an accurate understanding of the Bible?**

One, because without a word from the Sovereign Lord of creation, we are at a total loss as to how we got here, why we are here, and where we are going. Without His word the greatest questions of life are left to the biased and selfish theories and speculations of human wisdom. An honest, seeking heart however is simply not satisfied with that, nor the idea that we are here by blind chance. We are not the random accidental result of rocks, dirt, and gases whose origins cannot and are not logically or scientifically explained. **Thus if we do not have an accurate understanding of God’s word we will not know who our Maker is, why we are here and what will happen to us when we die. We’re simply left to serve and worship self and others.**

Two, Jehovah God our Creator and His Son Jesus Christ loves us (Jn. 3:16-17). In the beginning mankind was given free will because God loved us. Mankind speaks a lot about what love is and what love isn’t. To many the greatest demonstration of love is when a person is willing to live and die sacrificially for another. Think about the love of a mother or a father who will sacrifice themselves to provide and nurture for their children and then even sacrificially die that their child might live. Christ taught this great principle when He said *“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends”* (Jn. 15:13). The Gospel teaches that this is exactly what God’s Son came to do for us, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). He came to be the Lamb of God (Jn. 1:29), the

atonement [covering] sacrifice for all people (1 Jn. 2:2), to *“seek and to save that which was lost”* (Lk. 19:10) because He loved us and we needed it! Uniquely, the God-man who hung on the cross for each of us had done nothing wrong (Lk. 23:41; 1 Pet. 2:22), yet He lived and died for you and me, so that we could be reconciled to God (Rom. 5:10). **We will not know God’s incredible love nor our great need for Him if we do not have an accurate understanding of His word.**

Finally, our Creator has a divine purpose for each of us, namely to glorify and serve Him (Gen. 1:26-27; Isa. 43:7; Ecc. 12:13; Ps. 148). It is our responsibility to seek Him and serve Him faithfully (Acts 14:14-15; 17:27; Matt. 6:33). Jesus said *“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free”* (Jn. 8:31-32). Jesus plainly stated that we **can and must** understand God’s word in order to be

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His true disciples. However, if we do not, we will not be set free from sin (Jn. 8:33-36)! In sin we have no eternal hope whatsoever, but in Christ we have all the hope that we need (Eph. 2:12-13). God wants us to read His word because He desires *“all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth”* (1 Tim. 2:4). **By reading and studying His word we can have an accurate understanding of God’s conditions for salvation and be saved** (Jn. 3:14-17; 4:10, 13, 25-26; 8:24; 2 Pet. 3:9; Acts 17:30; Matt. 10:32-33; Rom. 10:9-10; Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38, 47; 22:16). God says *“give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth”* (2 Tim. 2:15 ASV). **If we fail to follow this command, we will not have an accurate understanding of His word and thus cannot do what He commands us to do. A failure to keep His commandments will ultimately lead to being separated from Him forever** (Matt. 7:13-14, 21-24; Jn. 7:17; 8:31-32; 2 The. 1:3-9; 1 Tim. 2:4). **Our being lost is not God’s desire** (2 Pet. 3:9)! Satan the father of lies says *“thou shalt not surely die”* (Gen. 3:4; Jn. 8:44)! Whom will we follow?

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- **Vocal music only** (Eph. 5:19; Heb. 13:15); **Giving** (1 Cor. 16:1-2)
- **Preaching** (Acts 2:42; 20:7)

The Churches of Christ

- Bible only (Rom. 1:16; 2 Pet. 1:3); Name of Christ (Rom. 16:16)
 - Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
- Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18); Purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28)
 - Established in the 1st century (Acts 2:47)
- Body of Christ and Christ alone is the Head and Savior (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23)
 - Added to the church today just as in the 1st century (Acts 2:41, 47)

Salvation

- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
- Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
 - Hear, belief, baptism (Acts 18:8)
 - Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)
 - Baptism does save us (1 Pet. 3:21)

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