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Conducted by  
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**“How would you explain Acts 2:38 in the light of the statement made by Paul in 1 Cor. 12:3, ‘And that no man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit’.”**

I rather think that a word of explanation about this question is in order. There are those who believe that a person can be in receipt of the Holy Spirit before having *obeyed* the Gospel. Therefore, what the question is really asking is this: “How can a person confess that Jesus is the Son of God *before* he is immersed if he is not in receipt of the Holy Spirit *before* immersion,” because 1 Cor. 12:3 says, “No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit”?

This is another classic example of taking two related but different ideas and manipulating them so that they *seem* to mean what someone *wants* them to mean, without due regard to the context in which they are written, or without necessary support from other scriptures, particularly in the N.T. Let us try, as objectively as we can, and without pre-conceived ideas, to find out what is *actually* taught.

### The Context

The statement in 1 Cor. 12:3 occurs during Paul’s discourse with the Church at Corinth regarding worship in the Church. He has taught about head-covering for women, and also given instructions as to how christians ought to conduct themselves when meeting around the Lord’s Table. In chapters 12-14 he turns his attention to the use and misuse of spiritual gifts, and it is at the beginning of this discourse that he makes the statement under consideration, which we will now repeat in full, and which read, “Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit.” We now need to consider the two parts of this statement.

### “Jesus is Accursed”

Before Paul uses these words he reminds the Corinthian brethren what they were before they became christians, “Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.” Now it ought to be obvious to anyone that Paul is here referring to their sinful and unregenerate state prior to salvation. In that condition they were “without hope,” and “without God” in the world; they were “lost”. Paul’s reaction to the Jews exemplifies *their* condition, as Acts records, “Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed he shook his raiment, and said unto

them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles" (Acts 18:5, 6). It is possible that Paul before *his* conversion, had tried to make christians blaspheme the name of Christ and His relationship to God, because he says, "I punished them off in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities" (Acts 26:9-11).

Now the point being made by Paul in 1 Cor. 12:3 is this: people still in the bondage of sin could and did say that Jesus was Anathema (accursed), because the darkness of sin and the Light of Christ are Anathema to each other, but no christian renewed and regenerated in Christ through the Gospel could say that Jesus was Anathema; the new creation in Christ Jesus should love the Lord to such a degree that they would never even contemplate such a remark, indeed, at the end of the First Letter to Corinth, Paul says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema" (1 Cor. 16:22). Rather curiously, Paul includes the Aramaic phrase "Maran-atha", "Our Lord (maran) cometh (atha)," which seems to express the watchword of every christian that the lord will, in fact, come; this was, and still is, a living hope among christians of all ages, and is probably another strong reason why no christian speaking with the spirit of God could ever say "Jesus is Anathema."

#### "Jesus is Lord"

This statement makes clear the broad and significant separation between the Church and the sinful world. This christian "bond" of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Church is, in the eyes of Paul, far above all distinctions as to the reception and manifestation of any spiritual gift made available by God for a specific time and purpose. It is infinitely more important for a person to be a *christian* than for a christian to "show off" any other attribute which would seem, in his eyes, to make him a *better christian* than someone else.

Therefore, in this second part of the statement under consideration, Paul is saying that just as a christian would not say that Jesus is Anathema, only christians who had obeyed the Gospel and were in receipt of the Holy Spirit *could* confess the Lordship of Jesus in their lives. It is a very important statement for Paul to make because it shows sin to be exceedingly sinful, and Grace to be exceedingly precious, especially to those who have embraced it. But the statement is not complicated in its context; it is only complicated by those who wish to promote points of doctrine which will embellish their own particular beliefs.

#### The first priority of the Holy Spirit

If we are serious in our wish to establish priorities consistent with the christian faith then we can do no better than to refer ourselves to the words of the Lord, for "they are spirit," and "they are life."

It seems to me that Jesus, shortly before He left His sorrowing disciples, expressed to them what the primary work of the Holy Spirit would be, "and when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:8-11). In verse 13 Jesus says, "Howbeit, when he the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all the truth."

Therefore, it would appear that Paul is saying that in essence the primacy of the Holy Spirit's work is in the Gospel. The Good News is that Christ died for our sins, and that He rose from the dead. This is a message which should be stated, believed, and obeyed, as Paul says, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how

shall they hear without a preacher . . ." "so then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:14-18). That the Holy Spirit is involved in the promotion of the truth cannot be doubted, because when Paul speaks about the whole armour of God he says, "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17).

Therefore, I conclude that when a person who has believed the Gospel message says, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," then that person is responding to the facts made known by God and inherent in the Gospel, and is not *in any way* uttering inspirational statements directly forced from his lips by direct intervention of the Holy Spirit, but is rather giving a response which the Gospel message exhorts him to give; that is a somewhat different emphasis from that which the inspirationalists give. It is a source of constant amazement to me why people crave for miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit in their lives when by obeying the Gospel they can take part in the greatest miracle ever revealed to man, namely, cleansing from sin, a new life in Christ Jesus, joint heirship with Christ, the abiding influence and comfort of Holy Spirit throughout their lives, preparing them for the everlasting glories of heaven. Is there a greater miracle than the Gospel? Is there a greater demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power than the sanctified life of a christian?

If I must make a summation of the question, then I would have to say that I believe that 1 Cor. 12:3 refers to the *lifelong* confession of the christian of the Lordship of Christ in his life, and has nothing whatsoever to do with the confession of *faith* in Christ as the saviour from sin.

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