

QUESTION BOX Conducted by Frank Worgan

Question- "Please explain what Peter meant when he spoke about 'the gift of the Holy Spirit', in Acts 2:38".

The verse referred to is unquestionably one with which every member in the Church of Christ is familiar, having frequently heard it quoted when the Gospel has been preached.

It is, however, a pity that in our anxiety to convince people of their need to obey the Gospel by being baptised in obedience to the Lord's command (Matt. 28:18-20), very often only the first part of the verse is emphasised; 'be baptised for the remission of your sins', whilst the latter part; 'and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit', is hurried over, with sometimes scarcely a mention.

The consequence has been that many members of the Church are not as familiar as they ought to be with what the New Testament teaches concerning the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, and people in other religious bodies have even been known to accuse us of not really believing in the Holy Spirit

There are, also, other circumstances that have a bearing on this situation.

False teaching about the Spirit

In 1856, William Arthur wrote a book entitled 'The Tongue of Fire' which, if you will excuse the expression, 're-ignited' interest in the doctrine of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. Many religious bodies suddenly rediscovered such scriptural expressions as, 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit', 'indwelling of the Spirit', 'filled with the Spirit', 'gifts of the Spirit', etc.

Unfortunately, however, the churches which like to be known as 'Evangelical', along with the so-called 'Charismatic' groups which quickly emerged in the early 1900's, used- (and continue to use)- these scriptural terms to propagate teaching about the Holy Spirit that is far from scriptural, and this has had the effect of causing preachers and teachers to appear reluctant to deal with the subject, lest they be misunderstood and are accused of holding suspect views, or even of leaning towards the 'Charismatic' movement.

The Godhead

Again, the matter has not been helped by the way in which the Holy Spirit is described by those churches that are usually regarded as 'orthodox' or 'traditional' in their views, because they often refer to Him as 'the Third Person in the Godhead', implying that the Father is the First Person, the Son is the Second Person, whilst the Holy Spirit is Number Three in the order.

We must understand that the Holy Spirit should never be regarded as 'third' in importance or rank, nor should He be thought of as being in any way inferior in nature to either the Father or the Son. The only way in which He might reasonably be described as the 'Third' Person in the Godhead, is in relation to the time of His coming and the commencement of His personal ministry.

The Age of the Spirit's Ministry

In John 14:15-16, having in mind His own imminent return to the Father after the fulfilment of His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus spoke to His followers about the coming of the Holy Spirit. He promised His followers, "/ will pray the Father and He will send you another Comforter". The word that is used - 'parakletos' - translated 'Comforter' in the 'A.V.' and the 'R.V.' describes 'one called alongside to help'.

Furthermore, Jesus promised that when the Spirit of Truth came, He would abide with believers 'for ever'. The word 'meno'- 'abide', means 'remain permanently'. He also explained, in John 16:7-15, that, the Holy Spirit's ministry would be to 'convict the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment'.

That ministry commenced on the day of Pentecost, as Acts ch.1 reveals. The Holy Spirit came, as the Lord had promised. And the Holy Spirit has never left! Today we see the ridiculous sight of 'Pentecostal' congregations earnestly praying for someone to come who has never gone away! What is more, He will not leave until the close of the Christian Age, when the Lord Himself returns.

So, we see, then, that the plan of salvation which originated in the mind of the Father, was implemented and fully realised in the life, death and resurrection of the Son, and today it continues to be made effective by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, through the preaching of the Good News.

That gospel was first presented in its fullness by Peter on the Day of Pentecost, and it was on that day that he announced that those who believe the message, repented and were baptised, would receive not only the forgiveness of their sins, but also the gift of the Holy Spirit.

'Gift' - not 'gifts'

As I have already suggested, it is this second promise which many Christians find difficult to understand.

Let us notice, therefore, that Peter spoke of the 'gift' - not 'gifts' - of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 2:38 the word 'gift' is the word 'dorea', which is accurately defined as 'free gift'. One translation renders it rather expressively as, 'the plus' of the Holy Spirit. The word describes the Holy Spirit Himself as the extra gift, provided by God, for those who obey the Gospel.

Thus, Acts 2:38 does not refer to some sort of miraculous or spiritual gift bestowed by the Holy Spirit. It tells us that the Holy Spirit Himself is the Heavenly Father's own gift to His obedient people; given to enable them to live a successful and satisfied Christian life.

The 'Gifts' - another subject

When, later, Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church about 'spiritual gifts', he was dealing with a very different subject.

In 1st Corinthians chapters 12 to 14, the nine gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit are described as 'charisma', or 'grace gifts', and it is important to distinguish between the Holy Spirit as God's own gift, and the miraculous gifts which, in the New Testament age, the Spirit Himself bestowed. Please notice that:-

1. The 'charismata' were various miraculous abilities or endowments, which the Holy Spirit Himself gave to individual believers, according to His own, will (1st Cor. 12:11).

2. Believers did not all receive the same gifts (ch. 12:29-30).
 3. Nor were these gifts intended to last (1st Cor. 13:8).
1. In contrast, the 'gift of the Holy Spirit' is the gift of God Himself, offered to every obedient believer (Acts 5:32).
 2. All are offered the same gift - the indwelling presence of His Spirit (1st Cor. 6: 19. Rom. 8:9).
 3. And, along with salvation, the gift of the Spirit's presence, will continue to be offered until the end of the Christian Age.

The Purpose of the Gift

What will this 'gift' do for us? This is a question worthy of a separate study, but think about just two aspects of His ministry.

- a) The Holy Spirit is described as the 'Comforter'. That English word comes from the Latin, 'comforts', which means, 'with strength'. Thus, the Holy Spirit strengthens us. We need to lean on Him.
- b) Romans 8:26-27 tells us that the Holy Spirit helps us when we pray, taking our faltering, stumbling petitions and presenting them to the Father, as our intercessor. We should make use of His intercession.

If you have obeyed the Gospel and accepted God's gift of forgiveness, the question is. have you also accepted His 'extra' gift?