



Conducted by
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"I have been having discussions on Acts 2 and would be grateful if you could tell me exactly what the gift of the Holy Spirit is in Acts 2 : 38"

The study of all aspects of the Holy Spirit is one of considerable depth, and I think that very often we are a bit put off when we read of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. We feel that the study of such a subject is best left to the "scholars" and "Intellectuals". While agreeing that the subject is a profound one it is nevertheless possible to learn a great deal from a perusal of the references to the Holy Spirit in the scriptures, and gradually build up a picture in our minds of His nature and work.

The above verse (Acts 2 : 38) has caused it s fair share of discussion and controversy and has had many a false construction placed upon it - especially upon the term mentioned, "the gift of the Holy Spirit". I shall try to make some helpful remarks on the matter.

Commandments and Promises

From the narrative in Acts 2 we understand that the apostle Peter is, and has been, preaching the gospel to a great company of Jews. He so successfully convicts them of their sinfulness and unworthiness in God's sight (as Christ's murderers) that they are forced to call out "Men, and brethren, what shall we do?" (v.37) The following verse, incorporating Peter's reply, is the verse our questioner is referring to. It runs thus: "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 Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

It is most important, I think, that we notice that the verse contains *two commands* and *two promises* and we must carefully distinguish between them, and not confuse them. A *command* and a *promise* are two very different things. The two commandments are (1) "Repent" and (2) "be baptized". These two commands of God are directed towards *everyone*. Those who would be saved *must* obey the commands - they must repent and be baptized. The two promises are *not* directed to *everyone* but are promised only to those who have obeyed the two commandments. The two promises are (1) "remission of sins" and (2) "The gift of the Holy Spirit".

Baptism in The Holy Spirit

Before suggesting what the phrase "the gift of the Holy Spirit" does mean, let us begin by stating what the phrase *cannot* mean. It cannot have any reference to Holy Spirit baptism as is sometimes claimed by some. The baptism Peter *commanded* was baptism in water; the baptism in the Holy Spirit was a *promise* with a restricted application, and indeed occurred only twice. These two occasions are recorded for us : Acts 2 - when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the apostles; and in Acts 10 : 44 - upon Cornelius and his household. These manifestations of the Holy Spirit were in fulfilment of Joel's prophecy, in Joel 2 : 28, where the prophet said "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions..." God said He would pour out His spirit upon

all flesh: the apostles represented the Jewish segment of the world, and Cornelius represented the Gentiles. It is worthy of note, as to the importance of baptism in water, that Peter commanded that Cornelius and his household be baptized in water even although they had, just previously, evidently been baptized in the Holy Spirit. 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit' means just what it says *ie.* an obvious *immersion* in the Holy Spirit with *visible* manifestations of cloven tongues "like as of fire" (see Acts 2:3) and clearly does not take place today. Those who, today, talk about having been baptized with the Holy Spirit signify, to me at any rate, that they do not know what they are talking about.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Again, 'the gift of the Holy Spirit' of Acts 2:38 is not to be confused with the very special and miraculous "gifts" of the Spirit given to some of the members of the church in its early days. Such gifts were given solely by the laying on of the apostles' hands and were for a temporary and specific purpose - which purpose is not relevant today. Jesus, in giving His final instructions to His disciples before ascending to heaven, said (Mark 16:15) "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved : but he that believeth not shall be condemned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; and they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." These then were some of the miraculous, or supernatural, "gifts" of the Holy Spirit and in the following verses we are informed of their purpose (v.20) "And they (the disciples) went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and *confirming the word* with signs following." The signs, or gifts, were necessary for giving confirmation to the spoken word in those early days of Christianity; but now the word has been confirmed and needs no further confirmation. Thus miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit no longer exist, nor are necessary. In any case these gifts could only be conveyed or bestowed upon the recipients by the laying on of *the apostles'* hands, and were thus confined to the lifetime of the apostles. In Acts 8 we read of Philip evangelizing in Samaria. Although Philip possessed miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit he could not *transmit* such gifts to others, and so Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem to impart such gifts (see verses 6,17). In v.18 we read "And when Simon saw *that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given*, he offered them money, Saying Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit." Thus by reason of the very nature of the impartation of such gifts of the Holy Spirit (by the laying on of the apostles' hands) we are all precluded from receiving such gifts today.

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Having thus briefly touched upon what the phrase in Acts 2:38 does not mean, let us deal with what it does mean. We recall that the promise of (1) remission of sins and (2) the gift of the Holy Spirit was to be available not only to Peter's immediate hearers, but to all men in all ages - to the children (or descendants) of Peter's immediate hearers - *ie.* to us today. "The gift of the Holy Spirit" of Acts 2:38 clearly refers to the indwelling of the Spirit in the heart of every believer. To *Christians* in Corinth Paul could say "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that *the Spirit of God dwelleth in you'*" (1Cor. 3:16); and again "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *which is in you*, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own".

The miraculous gifts of the Spirit passed with the infancy of the church but the Spirit did not pass. He has stayed on: He remains within Christ's followers. There is therefore a great difference between the "gifts" of the Holy Spirit and the gift of the indwelling of the Spirit. We sometimes also confuse the Holy Spirit and the word of God, especially in the context of 'conversion'. The Holy Spirit, being a person, is *the agent* in conversion, and the word of God is *the instrument*. The

surgeon uses the scalpel, but the surgeon is not to be confused with the scalpel or instrument. There is a great wealth of scripture which confirms the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in Christ's followers. Here are a few further examples: Peter said (Acts 5:32) "*We are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey him.*" Paul said to the disciples at Galatia (Gal. 4:6) "*Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father.*" To the Christians at Rome Paul said (Rom. 8:9) "*But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you, But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.*" Here we have sure sanction for using the term, 'the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.' We could also refer to "the communion" of the Holy Spirit with us. In 2 Cor. 13:14 Paul commends the Christians at Corinth to God in the following way: "*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*" In writing to Timothy, as a faithful disciple, Paul recognized that the Holy Spirit dwelt in him, and said "*That good thing which was committed unto thee guard through the Holy Spirit which dwelleth in us.*" (2 Tim. 1:14).

These verses serve as an illustration of the fact that the Holy Spirit sojourns with Christ's faithful followers and is received, together with remission of sins, at baptism. When we accept Christ as our saviour and are obedient to His instructions to "repent" and "be baptised" we receive 'remission of sins' and 'the gift, or indwelling, of the Holy Spirit'. We can allow Him to bring about our spiritual increase and enrich our spiritual lives, or we can smother and thwart Him by our indifferent lives. This is what Paul terms as *quenching* the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19). We can also *grieve* the Holy Spirit by our bitterness, anger and evil speaking, Paul warns us of this in Eph. 4:29, when he says "*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*" He also helps us with our prayers as they ascend to God (Rom. 8:26). The flesh is subdued by means of the indwelling Spirit, and the fruits of the Spirit can be produced in our lives: love, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against which there is no law (Gal. 5). All of these matters are associated directly with this "gift" (or indwelling) of the Holy Spirit.

My space has gone but I hope these remarks may stimulate further interest and study of the subject and have been of some service to the questioner.

"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God." (Rom. 8:9,14)