

MIRACLES, SIGNS AND WONDERS

By Jefferson David Tant

Jesus' last words to his disciples are known as "The Great Commission," which is recorded in **Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-18**. Verses **17-20** in **Mark's** record have been used by some denominations as proof that these miraculous manifestations are still in operation today. It is the purpose of this study to examine these claims.

These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed..."

The apostle Paul enumerated some of these signs or miraculous gifts in **I Cor.12:8-10**:

"For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues."

Jesus had earlier in his ministry promised his twelve disciples that miraculous powers would be given to them.

"And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give" (**Matt. 10:7-8**). "for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now...but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (**Acts1:5, 7**).

It is generally agreed that this baptism in the Holy Spirit was a reference to receiving the ability to perform miracles.

How was the power to perform miracles acquired?

Jesus told the disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. We see this happening on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 at the fulfillment of prophecy in the establishment of the church or kingdom of God.

"And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance" (**Acts 2:2-4**).

We are aware that the disciples had been able to perform miracles before as was cited in **Matthew 10**, but there is another aspect of this power which the disciples evidently had not had before—the ability to pass on the gift of miracles to others. We have the record of events that transpired in Samaria when the gospel was being preached there. Among the converts was Simon, who had been practicing sorcery.

"Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed. Now when the

apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." (**Acts 8:13-19**).

We remember that Peter severely rebuked Simon, upon which Simon repented and asked forgiveness. But the point to be made is seen in the fact that Simon came to understand that these miraculous gifts were "bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands." We see the same thing with respect to Paul and young Timothy: "For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (**II Tim. 1:6**).

The only other reference to the reception of any miraculous gifts is in the case of the household of Cornelius in **Acts 10** as Peter was preaching to them.

"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, 'Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?'" (**Vs. 44-47**)

It is significant to note that it had been perhaps nine or ten years since Pentecost in **Acts 2**, and multiplied thousands have been baptized into Christ during this period of time. But with respect to Holy Spirit baptism, Peter had to go all the way back to Pentecost to find a similar experience. Evidently none of the thousands who became Christians from **Acts 2** to until **Acts 10** had experienced this. And we find no like experience after **Acts 10**.

What was unique about Cornelius? He was the first Gentile convert. We know that Gentiles were "unclean" to the Jews, and God is using this occasion to prove in a powerful demonstration that Gentiles are now accepted. Peter expounded on this as he related the event to fellow Jewish Christians in **Acts 11:15-18**.

"And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way? When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.'"

The evidence shows that baptism in the Holy Spirit occurred only twice—once upon the apostles in **Acts 2** and once upon the household of Gentile Cornelius in **Acts 10**. All others who may have possessed miraculous gifts received it through the laying on of hands of the apostles—**Acts 8:13-19 and II Tim. 1:6**.

As a further indication that only the apostles had the ability to impart to others gifts through the laying on of hands, we note that in Acts 8, it is evident that Philip (the evangelist, not Philip the apostle) did not have the power to pass on miraculous gifts, even though he had the power to perform miracles himself. That had to wait until Peter and John arrived (**Acts 8:13-19**). This then brings the question as to how those who claim miraculous powers today obtained them.

The Scripture shows (1) that only the apostles and the household of Cornelius received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and (2) that only the apostles had the ability to pass on the power to impart miraculous powers to others through the laying on of hands, and (3) those people have all died. Therefore the Bible provides no other way for people today to receive miraculous powers.

What was the purpose of miraculous gifts?

It should be obvious to all that the main purpose of gifts was not to heal the sick in the world or give sight to all the blind, etc. If that was the purpose, then there was a great failure. Christ could have spoken one word, and every malady in the whole world would have been eliminated. Christ's purpose in performing miracles was to establish his credentials and identity as the Messiah, the Son of God, not to heal all the ills in the world.

The familiar story of Christ healing the paralytic man in **Matthew 9:2-8** illustrates this clearly.

“And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, ‘Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven.’ And some of the scribes said to themselves, ‘This fellow blasphemes.’ And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, ‘Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” --then He said to the paralytic, ‘Get up, pick up your bed and go home.’ And he got up and went home. But when the crowds saw this, they were awestruck, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.”

There had been others through the years who claimed they were the Messiah. Gamaliel had so testified before the counsel as he cautioned them as they were about to inflict punishment upon some of the apostles (**cf. Acts 5:34ff**). And now we have Jesus claiming that *he* is the true one. When Christ told the man his sins were forgiven, there was no black cloud over his head that dispersed or any other visible sign of this happening, and Christ understood that his words alone could not establish his claim. But he knew a way to get their attention.”But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” --then He said to the paralytic, ‘Get up, pick up your bed and go home.’”

The main purpose of the miracle was not to cure the paralytic, but to certify his identity.

On another occasion when John the Baptist was in prison, he sent his disciples to confirm that Christ was indeed the Messiah, “the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” (**John 1:29**).

“Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to Him, ‘Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and report to John what you hear and see: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM” (**Matt. 11:2-5**).

Thus we see that the purpose of Christ's miracles was to establish his identity.

Well, what about the miracles that the apostles performed? They really had much the same purpose. We go back to **Mark 16** and the Great Commission where Jesus promised they would perform different miracles, and then **in v. 20** the record says “And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and *confirmed* the word by the signs that followed....”

What were the miracles for? To confirm the word! Peter and the others were preaching to the multitude on Pentecost in at least 16 different languages. When the people were puzzled about this, Peter reminded them of the prophecy in Joel 2 and cited that day's events as fulfillment of the prophecy. This was a sign or miracle that he was speaking truth.

When Paul or others of the apostles went into some city and began to proclaim that the Messiah had come, many were probably thinking, “Yeah, we’ve heard this before.” So what was different this time? Their preaching was “confirmed...by the signs that followed...”

Question. Has the word been confirmed? The answer is an emphatic “Yes!” Over and over again. We don’t need to confirm it again. Consider an example. We believe John Wilkes Booth assassinated Abraham Lincoln. The evidence has been presented and affirmed. It has been proven, and we do not need to have a new trial and present evidence every time the matter is discussed. We can present the evidence that has already been established. The same is true of the Bible, the word of God. The evidence has been presented and the word has been confirmed. We don’t need any more miracles today to “reconfirm” the word. That would be a denial of the evidence God has already given, and be telling him that he didn’t do enough.

How long would the miraculous age last?

It has been shown that the only way miraculous powers could be conferred upon others (besides the apostles and Cornelius) was through the laying on of the apostles’ hands (**Acts 8 and II Tim. 1**). There is no evidence given that those who received the gifts could then pass them over to others. Thus, by the time the last person died upon whom an apostle had laid his hands, then miracles would have ceased. That would have been either late in the 1st Century or early in the 2nd Century.

There is evidence that support this.

“Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away” (**I Cor. 13:8-10**).

Paul says the gift of prophecy would be done away. Tongues and (miraculous) knowledge would cease and be done away. When? “When the perfect comes.” Now, some claim that refers to the coming of Christ, and thus miracles will continue until he returns.

But notice the text says “the perfect,” not “the perfect one,” nor “he that is perfect.” Other translations read “that which is perfect.” Christ is not a “that.” He is a person, not an inanimate object.

The point Paul is making is quite clear. During the 1st Century, the revelation was not complete. It took perhaps 50 years for the writings of the New Testament to be completed, as there is evidence John wrote the book of Revelation in the 90s. This is why the proclaimers of the gospel had to be “inspired” by the Holy Spirit to know what to write and preach. Christ told the apostles that after he had gone, the whole of God’s truth would be made known to them.

“I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you” (**John 16:12-14**).

Question. Did the Spirit of truth guide the apostles “into all the truth?” If “yes,” then there is no more truth to be revealed, and therefore no more need for inspired revelations from the Holy Spirit. If “yes,” then there are no more prophecies from the Lord. The prophets have spoken. The apostle John elaborates on this in closing the book of Revelation.

“I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from

the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book” (**Rev. 22:18-19**).

It cannot be clearer that *there are no more prophecies—no more revelations*. A prophet is one who speaks forth a revelation from the mind of God. God’s word makes it clear that prophecies have ceased. Paul said that would happen when the revelation was completed. He said “gifts of prophecy will be done away.” Yes, there are self-proclaimed prophets today, but they are *all* false prophets if we can believe what the Bible says. In fact, John warns us about them in **I John 4:1**: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

Jude adds weight to the matter in declaring that we are to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (**Jude 1:4**). If it has been “once for all handed down,” then there is neither nothing else nor nothing new to be revealed.

If the answer is “no” to the Holy Spirit having guided the apostles into all the truth, then we are in big trouble, for Christ’s promise did not come to pass.

Well, what about the healing miracles that are performed today?

We have TV preachers and others who hold great healing campaigns that attract huge crowds to witness so-called healings. Many “cures” have proven to be fakes, others are imagined, and still others may actually experience healing. Let us consider some examples.

Fake cures. Investigations at some of the big revival “healing” campaigns have revealed an elaborate system of fraud. Greeters are trained to talk to people as they arrive and gather information as to any ailments they might be suffering. They will pick out likely candidates and radio the information to the evangelist, who has an earpiece-receiver. He will then announce that he has been told by the “spirit” that there is someone present with acute lumbago or whatever. That person jumps up shouting “Me, Me,” and rushes up to the stage where he is “healed.”

These greeters will on occasion encounter a person with an obvious ailment, such as a prosthetic arm, or a large goiter on the neck, or some other similar problem. They would not dare to allow that person on the stage, but they are sent to a private room for prayer. Why? Because they *know* that the “healer” could not heal this person, and they don’t want a farce to be seen on the stage.

There have been documented cases of out-and-out fraud where “sick” people fake some disability, and go to be “healed” before a large audience. Did anyone mention the vast sums of money that are contributed to these healers? It seems I remember Jesus telling his disciples “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts” (**Matt. 10:8-9**).

What has happened? Doctors tell us that a great many of our ailments are psychosomatic, that is, they are caused by the mind. If your mind is convinced that something is wrong, then something is wrong. Thus, if you convince the mind that the ailment has been removed, it is gone. The same thing has been demonstrated to occur with hypnosis. It is the matter of the mind over the body.

There was a story of a young mother lifting a car off her child whose legs are pinned under a wheel. In her panic, her adrenalin flows and her strength is increased so much that she can actually move the car enough to extract her child. If she attempted to lift the car on the next day,

she would find it impossible. Many stories exist of superhuman strength that has manifested itself in emergencies.

Now, in a fit of emotion at the healing service, a person may have some affliction, some inability to walk properly, or something like that. But, being convinced they have been healed, the body's adrenalin might provide enough strength to begin walking. But then a few days later when the adrenalin subsides, the previous ailment returns.

Dr. William Nolen once followed the healing revivals of evangelist Kathryn Kuhlman. He received permission to interview those who had been "healed" a few days after the event took place. He wrote a book, and I believe it was titled "Healing, A Doctor In Search of a Miracle." I believe he stated that he did not find a single permanent cure. They all relapsed after their supposed miraculous cure.

Oral Roberts was a well known TV evangelist and healer. He founded Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and conducted healing revivals in many cities. He taught and evidently strongly believed in miraculous power by the laying on of the hands, as the apostles did.

On one of his TV programs he revealed that a nine-foot-tall Jesus had appeared to him while he was praying in his closet. (I was not aware that closets had ceilings that high, or that Jesus was that tall.) He said Jesus told him he was going to take his life unless he raised \$8 million to finish the hospital he was building. Sure enough, some man in Florida sent him the money. Question. *If Roberts could heal people by praying over them and/or laying his hands on them, **why did he need a hospital?*** Neither Jesus nor any of his apostles *ever* told those they healed to go find a doctor or a hospital.

Some years ago the late Foy Wallace, Jr. visited Angeles Temple in California, where faith-healer Aimee Semple McPherson held forth. A guide was taking people on a tour through the facilities, which included a "trophy" room—a place where crutches, canes, etc. were displayed. As the tour group continued on, Wallace stayed behind. In a few minutes the guide, who was a member of that church, came back and asked Wallace if he could help him. Wallace replied that he was looking for a glass eye, an artificial limb or some other artificial device which a healed person had left behind after being made whole. There was nothing like that. (And the guide, a member there, actually had an artificial leg!)

Why do the "miracle workers" today not raise the dead, cause the blind to see, and do other miracles that would be obvious to all? Isn't that what Christ promised to his disciples? Why do today's workers cure stomach aches, ulcers, cancers and other ailments that cannot be seen, and thus are not obvious to all watchers.

There was an occasion when Peter and John healed a man, and were preaching the gospel. The authorities were upset and wanted to put a stop to their preaching.

"And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply. But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another, saying, 'What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it'" (**Acts 4:14-16**).

No one ever questioned a single miracle that Christ or the apostles performed. Christ healed a man born blind (**John 9:1-7**). Has anyone ever done that in modern times? Christ replaced a man's ear that had been severed after Peter cut it off (**Luke 22:51**). Has anyone ever restored a severed body part today? Peter raised the dead Dorcas (**Acts 9:40**). Has anyone raised the dead today? Surely the news media would be all over this astounding accomplishment.

This all reminds me of something Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church about “the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders” (**II Thess. 2:9**). Does Satan have the power to deceive people with “signs and false wonders?”

“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds’ (**I Cor. 11:13-15**).

Some years ago I had a part in a debate which David Harkrider had with a Pentecostal preacher—Preacher Payne. Payne claimed he had all the miraculous powers the apostles had. Harkrider then produced a bottle of syrup of ipecac and put a “Poison” label on it. He then challenged Payne to drink it, for in **Mark 16:18**, Jesus said “and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them...” obviously the ipecac would not kill Preacher Payne, but it might make him throw up. But Payne responded by pointing to the word “if” in the passage. “The Bible says ‘if,’ and therefore I don’t have to drink it.”

After the session that night, Harkrider asked me if I could find a rattlesnake for him. I called a local Science Center and talked the curator into lending me a rattlesnake. Of course I had to sign a waiver, and he said that if the snake got out of the box and bit someone, he did not know me and never heard of me!

So the next night the snake was in a glass enclosure inside a closed cardboard box. Harkrider then gave Payne the opportunity to pick up the snake, and quoted again from **Mark 16:18** where it says “they will pick up serpents.” He reminded him of the “if” that enabled Payne to get out of drinking the “poison” the night before, and pointed to “they *will* pick up serpents,” not “If.” Payne finally went over and looked inside the box and saw there really was a rattlesnake there. But Payne refused to touch the snake.

The apostle Paul was bitten by a venomous snake, and was unharmed.

“But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, ‘Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.’ However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm” (**Acts 28:3-5**).

If Payne had the same power as the apostle Paul had, he would not have hesitated to pick up the snake.

What about speaking in tongues?

The first instance of speaking in tongues was on the Day of Pentecost, as the people were amazed that they heard these men speaking in their native tongues—some 16 of them.

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were

bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia..." (**Acts 2:4-9**).

Notice that the apostles were speaking in known languages, not some unintelligible babbling. I have visited various denominations and have heard various people speaking in "tongues," but no one seemed to know what was being said.

The apostle Paul gave some clear instructions as to the use of tongues. In **I Corinthians** he chides them for the improper use of the gift of tongues in verses **18-23**, and then verses **26-28** say the following:

"When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God."

I have *never* observed tongue speakers following these instructions. One time some woman in a balcony where I visited did give a brief "interpretation" of what the preacher was saying in a tongue, but I don't recall that she said as much as he had said. I have been present when 15 or so were all speaking in "tongues" at the same time, with no interpreters. Obviously, this is not of God, and therefore must be from Satan. If it were from God, then they would follow Paul's inspired instructions.

And with the "interpreters" there are also some problems. Recordings have been made of someone speaking in a tongue, and then the recording is played for different people who claim they have the "gift of interpretation." Now, when they all give different "interpretations" of what was said, that is just further evidence that this is all fake, and therefore not from God.

How many baptisms are there?

In general, the claim is made that today there are two baptisms—baptism in the Holy Spirit and baptism in water. In truth, there are several baptisms mentioned in the Scripture. (1) John's baptism (**Luke 7:29**); (2) the baptism unto Moses (**I Cor. 10:1-2**); (3) the baptism of the Holy Spirit (**Mark 1:8**); (4) the baptism commanded by Christ (**Mark 16:16**); (5) the baptism of suffering (**Matt. 20:22**); (6) the baptism of fire (**Matt. 3:11**); (7) Christ's own baptism (**Matt. 3:16**).

But many years later, as Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, he said there was only one baptism.

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, *one baptism*, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all" (**Eph. 4:4-6**).

What was this one baptism? The baptisms in numbers 1, 2, 3, 5 and 7 were all in the past. And number 6, baptism of fire, is yet in the future, as that refers to hell. So that leaves number 4. We have already shown that the baptism in the Holy Spirit only occurred twice—on Pentecost (**Acts 2**), and upon the household of Cornelius (**Acts 10**). It accomplished its purpose, and there is no need for it today. We also noted that Paul said in **I Corinthians 13:8-10** that the miraculous would cease when the "perfect" had come—the completed revelation.

What is the significance of number 4? It is the baptism commanded by Christ that accomplishes various things. (1) It is a baptism “for the remission of sins” (**Acts 2:38**); (2) It is a baptism connected with salvation (**Mark 16:16, I Peter 3:21**); (3) It is the means of our being united with Christ (**Gal. 3:27**); (4) It is connected with washing away our sins (**Acts 22:16**); (5) It is a picture and reenactment of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, where we put to death the old man of sin and are raised a new creature (**Rom. 6:3-7**); (6) It is the occasion of our becoming united with the church or body of Christ, as we are *baptized* into the body of Christ (**I Cor. 12:13, Eph. 1:22-23**).

Now, we can understand what Paul wrote when he said there is “one God, one Lord, one Spirit,” etc. No one can misunderstand that. The Holy Spirit baptism had nothing to do with one’s salvation, but the baptism in water commanded by Christ has *much* to do with our salvation.

Cornelius’ baptism by the Holy Spirit took place about 41 A.D. That is absolutely the last reference that is made to Holy Spirit baptism in the Bible. Then, over 20 years later, Paul said there remained only one baptism. The Holy Spirit had accomplished its purpose, just as John’s baptism had. They were no longer in existence. Thus those who claim there are two baptisms today fly in direct contradiction of the Words of Inspiration. I believe I’ll take what Paul said rather than the “two baptism” preachers.

Is there a difference between the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” and the “gift of the Holy Spirit”?

Peter’s response to the question asked in Acts 2:37 (“What must we do...?”), was “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (v. 38). Some have taken this to mean that everyone who is baptized for the forgiveness of sins would also be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

We have already established that this cannot be true, for **Ephesians 4:4-6** says there is only one baptism. One cannot equal two. It is also worth noting that in the New Testament church, it is obvious that not all Christians had miraculous powers automatically given to them when they were baptized. Remember that many were baptized in Samaria as Philip was preaching to them, but they did not receive any power to perform miracles until Peter and John came and laid hands on them (**Acts 8:12-17**).

Thus baptism did not give miraculous power. But **Acts 2:38** says that all who are baptized will receive “the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, it is obvious that the “gift” is different than the “baptism.”

So, just what is the gift? There are two possibilities. (1) The Holy Spirit is given in some measure. (2) The Holy Spirit gives the believer something.

One possibility is seen in **Acts 3:19**: “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” Consider, their sins have been forgiven, and “times of refreshing” have come. Could it be that the Holy Spirit gives this comfort to the believers whose sins have been erased?

Another possibility is that the Holy Spirit is given to dwell within us even as Christ dwells in us. There are various passages that speak of this idea of “dwelling in us.”

Ephesians 3:17 – “...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love...”

Colossians 3:16 – “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you...”

James 4:5 -- “Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: ‘He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us’”?

How, then, does Christ dwell in us, or the Holy Spirit? It is not a personal indwelling, but they dwell in us through the Word, *by faith*. Notice the language: “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts *through faith*...” And again, “*Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you.*”

How do we obtain faith? Does God just zap us and plant faith in our minds? Paul informs us in **Romans 10:17** that “...faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” Thus, as we read and study God’s word, and take it into our hearts, that’s how these spiritual beings come to dwell in our hearts. There is no Scripture that indicates that it is a *personal* indwelling.

What is the conclusion?

Sadly, all this confusion and false teaching is but a fulfillment of what the Scripture says. “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons” (**I Tim. 4:1**). Over and over again we are warned about false teachers, and some even disguise themselves so as to fool people.

“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds’ (**I Cor. 11:13-15**).

It is my prayer that the readers of this material will follow the Bible rather than the doctrines of men.
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