Subject: HAVE YOU RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT SINCE YOU BELIEVED?
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HAVE YOU RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT SINCE YOU BELIEVED?
Many well-meaning Christians insist that there is no "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" subsequent to salvation, or, at the very least, that "speaking in tongues" is not the initial sign of the reception of such an experience, the stress of Acts 19:1-7 seems to indicate otherwise. This passage's description of Paul's encounter with a group of Ephesian disciples, his intriguing question, and their subsequent, life-changing reception of the Holy Spirit, is an invaluable teaching tool for relating the nature of that "second experience" known as the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

"And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve" (Acts 19:1-7).

Paul's Puzzling Question

Paul's initial response to these new-born Christians may come as somewhat of a surprise to those schooled in the traditional viewpoint (Mk. 7:9&13: 9 â€œAnd he said unto them, Full well ye reject {frustrate} the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.â€• 13 â€œMaking the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.â€•) which holds that every believer receives the Holy Spirit at the time of his conversion --automatically, inevitably, often unconsciously, and usually unceremoniously. In fact, to even broach the question "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?" is considered in some circles a tell-tale token of a faulty theology. For Paul, however, the question was not only legitimate; it was absolutely essential. Unshackled by the theological assumption that every believer has necessarily received the Holy Spirit and evidently detecting some deficiency in their Christian experience which indicated they had not, the discerning Apostle is bold to inquire, "Have ye received the Holy Spirit since ye believed?" (Acts 19:2).

One of the untold tragedies among contemporary evangelicals/fundamentalists is a short-sided theology that refuses to give unbiased attention to the searching, and, might we add, embarrassing (from the standpoint of their theology), implications of Paul's crucial question. Its very existence in the Sacred Text presents an enigma that no amount of theological

circumlocution or exegetical acrobatics can adequately explain. The issue is profoundly simple: if Paul believed that every Christian is filled with the Holy Spirit at the time of his or her conversion, the answer to his question of whether they had received the Holy Spirit since their initial belief in the gospel would have been a foregone conclusion. Well might they have answered, "Why, of course Paul, every believer realizes that the Holy Spirit is received automatically the moment he exercises faith in Jesus as the Messiah! Why do you ask?" Paul, however, did not view the answer to his question as self-evident. It was a necessary question, yes, even a crucial one-the answer to which was sure to reveal the status of their spiritual experience. It was, and is, one of those "dangerous" spiritual questions that are sure to raise eyebrows, unnerve the cozy traditionalists, and spawn an interest in investigating an hitherto unexplored realm of Christian experience. As we shall soon see, it is a question which, if honestly considered, could usher you into a new and invigorating dimension of the Christian life. It is, in any event, a question that demands an answer.

Teeming With Implications

The profound nature of Paul's question is seen in the fact that it reflects his understanding -- which, for those who believe in the inspiration of Scripture, is the only reliable one -- of the nature of the believer's reception of the Holy Spirit. Is the reception of the Spirit an optional matter, or is it absolutely essential to empowered Christian living? Do believers automatically receive the Spirit at the moment of their conversion, or is HE received sometime subsequent to salvation? As a rule, is the reception of the Spirit a rather mysterious transaction, or is it an experience of which the believer is definitely conscious? Is the reception of the Holy Spirit to be accompanied by some external token which serves as standard evidence that HE has indeed filled an individual, or is the proof of HIS arrival limited to subjective conviction and/or guesswork? All of these crucial issues are involved in Paul's striking enquiry.

Teeming with implications that we dare not ignore, Acts 19:1-7 portrays the believer's reception of the Holy Spirit as: (1) significant, (2) subsequent to salvation, (3) a supernatural experience of which the believer is definitely conscious and, (4) accompanied by a supernatural sign which signals to observers that the recipient has genuinely received the promised Comforter. It is to a consideration of this four- fold description of the Spirit's reception that we now turn.

A Significant Experience

Isn't it interesting -- and no doubt noteworthy -- that of all the questions Paul could have posed these new born Christians, he chose to ask them, "Have ye received the Holy Spirit since ye believed?" Otherwise appropriate questions such as "Are you bearing the fruit of the Spirit?" or, "How are you progressing in the Christian life?" could have suggested themselves to Paul's mind, but amazingly enough, his supreme objective was to know whether they had received the Holy Spirit. Why?

Is it not because the reception of the Holy Spirit is vitally important to the ongoing work of the Lord in the life of the believer? Indeed, Paul recognized -- as did the entire apostolic church -- that apart from the Holy Spirit's infilling, the believer must of necessity be resigned to a mediocre, albeit Christian, existence, Moreover, he evidently detected that there was a missing element in the experience of these fledgling saints and so, out of concern for their souls, posed the pertinent question, "Have ye received the Holy Spirit since ye believed?" (Acts 19:2) So significant was the reception of the Spirit in his eyes, that he could not avoid broaching such a personal question. He no doubt knew that Jesus had identified the Holy Spirit as the believer's power Source, when, in one of Jesusâ€™ post-resurrection appearances (Acts 1:8), He said "But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me,..." Paul also knew that apart from the infilling of the Holy Spirit these newborn believers would prove woefully ineffective in the fierce struggle that is the Christian life (Hebrews 12:4 â€œYe have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.â€• Ephesians 6:12 â€œFor we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.â€•) How were they to consistently "walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16 â€œThis I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and {fulfil not} ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.â€•) be "led by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:18 â€œBut if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.â€•), "pray in the Spirit," (1 Corinthians 14:15 â€œWhat is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.â€• or yield to the Spirit in the all important mortification of the deeds of the body (Romans 8:13 â€œFor if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.â€•), unless they had first of all received HIS charismatic presence within?

Realizing that the reception of the Spirit was essential to their spiritual development, he was anxious to know whether they had received the Blessed Comforter (John 14:16 â€œAnd I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for everâ€•).

Paul's penetrating evaluation of the Ephesian situation has implications for today. If, from the portals of New Jerusalem, Paul were permitted a glimpse of the alarming impotence that characterizes the twentieth century church, would he not suspect, as was the case with the Ephesian disciples, a missing element in its spiritual experience? As the spectacle of rampant divorce (except it be for the cause of fornication [Matthew 5:32 â€œBut I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.â€• 19:9 â€œAnd I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.â€•]) and remarriage, powerless preaching, creeping lukewarmness and evident worldliness met his eye, might he not well ask, as he did of old, "Have ye received the Holy Spirit since ye believed?"

It is painfully obvious to the perceptive observer that the church of our day is suffering severely from a serious power shortage. Unable to minister effectively to the spiritual needs of its members, it has become, more or less, content with the role of a referral agency. When members are stricken with some debilitating disease, the church may be quick to refer them to a leading medical specialist, but it too often finds itself woefully unable to offer the "prayer of faith" which will -- according to Scripture -- without fail heal the sick (James 5:14,15 â€œIs any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.â€•). Or is it a question of some mental disorder? Here again, the church, just like the world (contrast to Rom. 12:1&2 â€œI beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.â€•), franticly seeks to enlist the assistance of secular psychology and psychiatry, rather than casting out the unclean spirits of depression in the power of the Holy Spirit (Mark 16:17 â€œAnd these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;â€• Matthew 12:28 â€œBut if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.â€•)! The church -- in many quarters at least -- can no longer say with the Apostle Peter, as he spake to the lame man at the gate called Beautiful, "Silver and gold have I none, but, such as I have, give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). The reason for this is as simple as it is sad: many in the church no longer have what the early church considered absolutely essential -- a supernatural infilling with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:4 â€œAnd they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.â€•)

Subsequent To Salvation

Another significant issue raised by Paul's probing question is the all important matter of when one actually receives the Holy Spirit-whether at the time of, or subsequent to salvation. While many well-meaning Christians insist that the Holy Spirit is inevitably received at the time of one's conversion,

C. I. Scofield is representative of this view, when he says in a footnote to this passage: "Both passages [alluding to Acts 1:8 â€œBut ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.â€• and 19:2 â€œHe said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.â€•] could not be stronger in indicating that the Spirit was given at the time of believing; The New Scofield Study Bible (New York: Oxford University Press), 1192.

the grammatical construction of Paul's question indicates otherwise. The original Greek of his

query may be accurately translated, "After that ye believed [or, 'having believed'] did ye receive the Holy Spirit?" Crucial to the proper interpretation of this text is an accurate understanding of the time-sequence denoted by the Aorist Participle. C. F. D. Moule, in his book, An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek, 2nd edition. (London: Cambridge University Press), p. 99, cites the general rule for translating the Greek Aorist Participle when he writes:

"When the context positively demands a decision as to the sequence of the actions referred to in the participle and the main verb respectively, it often turns out that a Present Participle alludes to an action with which the action of the main verb coincides (at least in part), while the Aorist participle refers to action previous to what is referred to in the main verb " [italics mine].

Machen also concurs with this rule for translating the Aorist Participle. He concludes: â€œ... The aorist participle denotes action prior to the action denoted by the leading verb, whether the action denoted by the leading verb is past, present or future." Gresham Machen, New Testament Greek For Beginners (Toronto, Canada: The Macmillan Company), pp. 116-117. Though the aorist participle can at times signify action coincident to that of the main verb, the general rule justifies the King James Version translatorâ€™s understanding of the time sequence.

The verdict of such authorities can lead to but one conclusion: The King James Version translators were correct in understanding the time sequence of Paul's question as being first, believe, and then, receive the Holy Spirit. This in turn can only mean that the Apostle Paul conceived of the reception of the Holy Spirit as occurring subsequent to salvation. Nor is this the only place in Scripture where they believe on Jesus first/then receive the Holy Spirit sequence is to be found. Acts 8:5-17 â€œ5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. 6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.
8 And there was great joy in that city. 9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: 10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.
11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.
12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs {Gr. signs and great miracles} which were done. 14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: 15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: 16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) 17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.â€• is equally clear in its teaching that the reception of the Spirit is an experience quite

distinct from salvation (cf. v. 16, which, in direct reference to previously saved and water-baptized believers, says: 'For as yet he [the Holy Spirit] was fallen upon none of them...'). In addition, Ephesians 1:13 is highly instructive, especially in view of its correspondence with the experience of the Ephesian disciples, whose reception of the Spirit has been the subject of our discussion. There we read, "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." "After that ye believed"! Clearer evidence could scarcely be found; may it serve to convince the unbiased reader of a valid reception of the Holy Spirit subsequent to salvation.

A Conscious Experience

When Paul asked the thought-provoking question, "Have ye received the Holy Spirit since ye believed?" he obviously expected his listeners to be fully aware of whether they had received the Spirit's indwelling presence. That is to say, he understood the reception of the Spirit to be a personal experience of which the believer is vividly conscious. If they had received the Spirit they would know it: and the very fact that they did not know it (verse 2b - 'We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Spirit') served to prove that they had not. Thus, the very wording of his question implies that for Paul the reception of the Spirit was a supernatural, personal occurrence of which the recipient was acutely aware. This is the only rational explanation for the form of Paul's question; it is, moreover, the only view that harmonizes with the body of Biblical evidence which strongly suggests that, for the New Testament believer, the reception of the Spirit was a conscious experience. How else are we to understand such references as 1 John 3:24b- â€œAnd hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us" -or, Galatians 3:2- "... Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" Plainly, they imply (as does Paul's question in Acts 19:2a â€œHe said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?â€•) that the reception of the Spirit is a definite experience to which believers can consciously relate.

A Sign-Attested Experience

In response to the Ephesiansâ€™ apparent ignorance of the need of receiving the Spirit after their initial belief, Paul proceeded to lay hands upon them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Immediately the Spirit came upon them, announcing His arrival with a charismatic display of tongues and prophecy (Acts 19:6 â€œAnd when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.â€•). Indeed, in every account in the Book of Acts where we are told what actually happened when believers received the Spirit speaking in tongues is the common feature. (Acts 2:4 â€œAnd they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.â€•; 10:44-46 â€œWhile Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost 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 Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,â€• 19:6 â€œAnd when

Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.â€•), It was the display of tongues that soundly convinced the Jewish believers who accompanied Peter to Cornelius' household that this Gentile gathering had genuinely received the Holy Spirit. They judged by what they heard; and what they heard was tongues-â€œfor they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God" (Acts 10:46). Though often despised today, it was this selfsame, supernatural token that announced the indwelling presence of the Spirit among the 120 in the upper room (Acts 2:4 â€œAnd they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.â€•), and which was identified by our Lord Himself as one of the signs which are to follow believers (Mark. 16:17 â€œAnd these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;â€•).

Are you a believer? Are you conscious of a reception of the Spirit accompanied by the sign of tongues? If not - why not?

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