



Seek The Old Paths

“Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths. . . and walk therein”
(Jeremiah 6:16)

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THE NEW BIRTH #2

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THE NEW BIRTH EXPLAINED

I. The Great Commission of Christ Explains the New birth

During the Lord's personal ministry He taught in figures, symbols, and parables; but after His resurrection He gave plain commands. Before He went back to Heaven, He said to his apostles: *“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”* (Mark 16:15-16). In stating the terms of salvation upon this occasion, He stated exactly the same truth that He had announced to Nicodemus early in His public ministry, only this time, in plain commandments. Mark 16:16 and John 3:5 are identical in their teaching — they both mean exactly the same thing. For the sinner today to obtain salvation, he **MUST** believe **AND** be baptized.

After the church was established, the apostles always considered the person who had believed and had been baptized a Christian.

BELIEVE — BEGOTTEN OF GOD

In every natural birth there must be the father who does the “begetting.” In order to have a natural birth, two things are necessary: (1) begetting, and (2) birth, or deliverance. In the spiritual realm, we are “begotten” of God, our Father, through the Gospel, the Spirit's message; then, after being “begotten” or made a believer, we are “born” of water (immersed) according

to the teaching given by the Spirit.

Note these scriptures which show we are begotten by the Father through the word:

1. *“Of his (God's) own will begat he us WITH THE WORD OF TRUTH, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures”* (James 1:18).

2. *“Being born again”* (having been **BEGOTTEN AGAIN** — ASV), *“not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, BY THE WORD OF GOD, which liveth and abideth forever. . . And THIS IS THE WORD WHICH BY THE GOSPEL IS PREACHED UNTO YOU”* (1 Peter 1:23, 25).

3. *“For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have **BEGOTTEN YOU THROUGH THE GOSPEL**”* (1 Cor. 4:15). This means: “have made you believers by preaching the gospel to you.”

4. *“The seed is the word of God”* (Luke 8:11).

But the Holy Spirit gave the word of God through inspired men. Therefore, when one is begotten by the word in believing the Gospel, it may also be said to have been done by the Holy Spirit. *“The WORDS I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life”* (John 6:63). To be begotten and to believe are one and the same thing. *“Whosoever BELIEVETH that Jesus is the Christ is **BEGOTTEN OF GOD**”* (1 John 5:1, ASV) The word (seed) is planted in the heart by hearing. Faith comes by hearing God's word (Rom. 10:17). Being begotten by the Spirit through the word is necessary to being born again.

How is a person begotten by the Spirit?

By hearing the Spirit's voice — the Spirit's message.

In Paul's sermon at Antioch in Pisidia, he spoke of *“the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day”* (Acts 13:27). These people heard the prophets; they heard the **VOICES** of the prophets. How? By hearing the law read aloud every Sabbath day in their synagogues — by hearing the **WRITINGS** of the prophets. And so today we hear the voice of the Spirit by hearing the word of God — the word given by the Spirit through inspired men. This is the way we hear the Spirit today, and this is the only way we hear His voice.

The Holy Spirit was given to the apostles to guide them into all truth, and when they preached, it was the Spirit's message. The people heard and believed — were begotten; and in obedience to the Spirit's command, they were baptized (immersed), and thus became the children of God. *“Many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized”* (Acts 18:8).

After one has been begotten, he may then be born. *“He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”* — that is, of

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The New Birth #2...



Editorial...

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND WATER BAPTISM

Garland M. Robinson

Some would have 1 Corinthians 12:13 say that all who believe are baptized with the Spirit into the body of Christ.

First Corinthians 12:13 says, *“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”*

This verse does not say one is baptized into the Spirit or baptized by the Spirit or baptized with the Spirit. What it says is that men are “baptized into one body.” The instruction to be baptized is given by the Spirit (just as all instructions in the Bible are given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit). 2 Tim. 3:16-17 says: *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”* Also, 2 Peter 1:20-21 says, *“that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”*

Whether Old Testament or New Testament, the Scriptures were not given by man’s interpretation, opinion, thinking or ideas. These verses have nothing to do with how one interprets the Bible. They have to do with “how” the Scriptures came about. They reveal to us the “source” of the Scriptures. The Scriptures were given by “holy men of God” as they were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write. Their written words (Scriptures) were infallible because they were not their own words. They were words given them by the inspiration of the holy Spirit.

Sinners who **believe in Jesus** (John 8:24), **repent of their sins** (Acts 17:30), **confess that Jesus is the Son of God** (Acts 8:37), are then **baptized into the one body**

(**church**) of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 2:38). The “body” is the church of Christ (Col. 1:18). The “church” is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). HOW does one become a member of the body, the church? By being baptized into it (Rom. 6:3, *“baptized into Jesus Christ”*). WHEN does one become a member of the church? When one puts Christ on in baptism (Gal. 3:27, *“for as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ”*).

Baptism (and all that we know and do) is made known by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit inspired men to speak and write the Scriptures. According to the teaching/instruction of the Spirit, a sinner is baptized into the one body. When one is baptized in water, he/she becomes a member of the body of Christ — the body of the saved (Eph. 5:23).

During Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, he revealed to the audience that God had declared Jesus to be both Lord and Christ (v.36). *“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? 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. ... And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls”* (Acts 2:37-38, 40-42). When they were baptized, the Lord added them to the body/church of Christ (Acts 2:41,47). That does not happen WHEN one believes, or WHEN one repents, or WHEN one confesses faith in Jesus. If so, where is the Scripture that says that? There’s not one. However, the Scriptures do say that God adds those who are baptized

to the body of Christ, the church, the saved (Acts 2:41,47).

As the waters of the flood saved the eight people on board the ark from the destruction beneath its waves, *“...baptism doth also now save us”* (1 Peter 3:21). Baptism has nothing to do with washing the body of flesh, but it has everything to do with washing one’s soul/spirit. Baptism is the *“answer of a good conscience toward God.”* That is, when a sinner, from the heart, obeys the commands of the Spirit to be baptized (Acts 2:38; 10:48), he is *“THEN made free from sin”* and becomes a *“servant of righteousness”* (Rom. 6:17-18). Water baptism is the *“form of doctrine”* that was delivered to them (in verses 3-6); therefore, when they obeyed that doctrine by being baptized, they were made free from sin. A sinner is immersed in water and a child of God is raised from the water.

Salvation is IN Christ, not outside of Christ (2 Tim. 2:10). *“Therefore if any man be IN Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* (2 Cor. 5:17). One’s old life of sin is done away and a new life begins. That is the purpose of water baptism.

The baptism spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12:13 reminds those who are Christians that they were baptized into one body — the body/church of Christ. This is done according to the teaching of the Spirit. The brethren at Corinth had not received the baptism of the Holy Spirit because it was limited to only a few. It was given to the apostles (Acts 2:1-4) to enable them to preach by divine inspiration. It was given at the house of Cornelius to prove to Peter that God accepts the Gentiles (Acts 10:34-35, 44-48). The baptism of the Holy Spirit had not occurred since the day of Pentecost and never occurred again after Acts 10.

The baptism mentioned in 1 Cor. 12:13 is for everyone who desires to have forgiveness of sins and be added to the body of the saved (Acts 2:38,41,47; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:20-21; Eph. 5:23). Water baptism was instituted in Acts 2 and will continue till the end of the world (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). That cannot be said of Spirit baptism. It was temporary, limited to only a few, and never made one a Christian. Water baptism is permanent, for all humanity, and makes one a Christian.

Acts 8 provides a good example of water baptism and shows that it does not include Spirit baptism; nor the ability to work miracles (v.16). Philip went to Samaria and preached Christ unto them. “...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” (v.12). At their baptism their sins were washed away (Acts 2:38; 22:16; cf. Rom. 6:17-18). It was not until Peter and John (apostles) came and laid hands on them that “they received the Holy Ghost” (vs.14-19). It was only through the laying on of the apostles’ hands that the Holy Spirit was given which enabled them to work miracles (vs.17-19).

Ephesians 4:5 says there is “ONE BAPTISM.” If, as some say, there is “spirit baptism” and there is “water baptism,” then that makes two baptisms. But, there’s only one. You can’t have both. Jesus commanded the apos-

ties to go into all the world and “teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:19-20). The command to teach and baptize is to be practiced “unto the end of the world.” Was it “Spirit” baptism or “water” baptism that Jesus commanded the apostles in the great commission? It was water baptism. Therefore, water baptism is the one baptism we read about in Ephesians 4:5.

Read Ephesians 4:4-6:

How many BODIES are there? ONE.

How many SPIRITS are there? ONE.

How many HOPES are there? ONE.

How many LORDS are there? ONE.

How many FAITHS are there? ONE.

How many BAPTISMS are there? ONE.

How many GODS are there? ONE

Why do people believe and say there are many bodies, many hopes, many faiths and many baptisms; and at the same time say there is only one Spirit, one Lord, one God?

God calls all men to be saved, not just some men. The whole world is called to be saved by the Gospel. Second Thessalonians 2:14 tells us HOW God calls men. He calls sinners by the GOSPEL, the teaching of the Gospel, not a mysterious experience. Regarding this point Jesus said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And **they shall be all taught of God.** Every man therefore that hath **heard**, and hath **learned** of the Father, cometh unto me” (John 6:44-45).

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The New Birth #2...

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the will of God (John 1:11-13). When one believes, he has the power (the right or privilege) to BECOME a son. A person does not become a child of God (saved) the very MOMENT he believes. If he were THEN a son, power could not be given him TO BECOME A SON! We are not saved by “faith only” (James 2:24). The believer becomes a son when his faith, working by love, leads him to repent and be baptized as the Holy Spirit commands (Acts 2:38; Gal. 5:6; 3:26-27; John 14:15; John 12:42-43).

So, when one believes with the heart that Jesus is the Son of God, he is begotten of God; and when he is baptized (immersed in water according to the Spirit’s teaching), he is then “born of water and of the Spirit.” The new birth is then completed and the individual is in the family of God.

II. The New Birth is Explained in Acts of the Apostles

The apostles of Christ explained the new birth in a very simple way in their preaching. When we study the cases of conversion under the guidance of the apostles, we learn exactly what the new birth is. One thing is worthy of note concerning their preaching;

namely, when they told sinners what to do to be saved, they NEVER said: “Ye must be born again;” but they preached its equivalent. People were told in PLAIN LANGUAGE how to enter the kingdom. Therefore, the best way to find the new birth explained, is to go to the divine records in the book of Acts and learn what sinners did under the preaching of the apostles.

(1) The Three Thousand On Pentecost

The first example is on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The Holy Spirit, on this occasion, came upon the apostles to guide them into all truth, as the Saviour had promised (John 14:16-17,26; 15:26-27; 16:7-13; Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4). On this day people were convicted — “pricked in their heart.” What did the work? The Holy Spirit, but not in a direct manner. The Bible says, “When they HEARD THIS they were PRICKED in their heart” (Acts 2:37). Not when they FELT this, but “WHEN THEY HEARD THIS.” The Spirit, by the words preached by Peter, made believers out of them — convinced them that they had taken the Christ and killed Him, and that God had raised Him from the dead. Hence, as believers, they cried out, “men and brethren, what shall we do?” What were they told to do? Now Peter did

not tell them to be born again. He said: “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” (Acts 2:38). He told them in PLAIN LANGUAGE what to do to enter the kingdom of God. Three thousand obeyed and were saved. “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). The chapter closes by saying: “And the Lord ADDED TO THE CHURCH daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

Here is the new birth explained. The church (kingdom) is now established, and people are told exactly how to enter into it. The second chapter of Acts is the best commentary ever written on John 3:5!

ALL COULD have been saved that day, and WOULD HAVE BEEN, had they done what the three thousand did. There was no direct operation of the Spirit upon the sinners. The people did not receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit; it came to the apostles. The people who were saved received the Spirit’s MESSAGE when they obeyed the command to repent and be baptized.

Years later, Peter wrote to Christians scattered “throughout Pontus,

Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1); and told them they had been “born again” (1 Peter 1:23). In Acts 2:9-10, we read of people being present on Pentecost from these places Peter mentioned in his letter. These Christians who had been “born again” were the very people who were saved on Pentecost. Peter, standing up with the eleven, preached the word, the first Gospel sermon ever preached — sowed the seed of the kingdom — and they heard it, believed it, received it into their hearts, and were “begotten.” When they cried out to know what to do to be saved, they were told to repent and be baptized in the name of Christ for the remission of sins; and they gladly received the word and were baptized. Then years later, Peter wrote to these Christians: “*seeing ye HAVE purified your SOULS in OBEYING THE TRUTH through the Spirit. ... Being BORN AGAIN, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever*” (1 Peter 1:22-23).

Some claim that the phrase, “born again,” means “born from above.” Some translations give it this way. In a sense this is true. The Gospel, the word by which we are begotten, comes from above, not from man. The Gospel preached was by “*the Holy Ghost sent down from HEAVEN*” (1 Peter 1:12). The commands to repent and be baptized are from above, not from man; they are God’s commandments. Therefore, when one hears the Gospel, believes, repents, and is baptized, he is born from above. The three thousand on the day of Pentecost were born from above.

(2) The Samaritans

Let us take another example (Acts 8:5-12). Philip went to the city of Samaria and preached Christ (the Gospel); the people HEARD, BELIEVED, and were BAPTIZED. “*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.*” When these people believed and were baptized, they were saved (Mark 16:16)! Were they in the kingdom? Yes, the saved are added to the church, and the church is the kingdom of Christ. Then they had been born again, born of water and of the Spirit.

Friends, if it took that to put people into the kingdom THEN, how

do you expect to get into the kingdom by doing LESS than that NOW? Has the law of entrance been changed?

(3) The Eunuch

A similar story is related in the same chapter concerning the conversion of the eunuch (Acts 8:26-39). He heard the same old Gospel story, believed it, confessed his faith in Christ (cf. Rom. 10:10; 1 Tim. 6:12-13), was baptized, and went on his way rejoicing. See him as he goes down the road — he is happy! He is now a child of God, a saved man. (The eunuch rejoiced because of sins forgiven AFTER he was baptized). This is the new birth explained. Is there anything hard to understand about it?

If the language of John 3 seems to be difficult to understand, then study it in connection with the plain and easily understood cases of conversion, for after all, these are but examples of people being “born again.” The first law of Biblical interpretation is that “passages which are obscure or difficult to understand must be interpreted in the light of those scriptures which are clear and explicit.”

(4) Saul Of Tarsus

Let us take one more example — Saul of Tarsus, later known as Paul. He was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians; saw Jesus; was convinced of his disobedience to the Lord; and in faith cried out, “*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*” Jesus answered, “*Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou MUST DO*” (Acts 9:6). Saul went to Damascus and for three days waited to be told what to do (Acts 9:6). Ananias, who knew the plan of salvation, was sent to him. And to this believing, sorrowing, praying, penitent man, Ananias said: “*And now, why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord*” (Acts 22:16). As soon as Ananias came to Paul, the “altar services” (his praying) ceased, and he arose and was baptized. Ananias told him what he MUST DO, and he did it. Paul did not obtain forgiveness until he was baptized. In baptism, his sins were washed away (forgiven) by the blood of Christ. Years later, Paul wrote in Colossians 1:13-14 — God “*hath delivered US (that included Paul) from the power of darkness, and hath TRANSLATED US INTO THE KING-*

DOM of his dear Son; in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27).

The Lord appeared to Paul, not to save him, but to qualify him to be an apostle (Acts 26:16; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:5-8). Before Paul could be an apostle, he had to see Jesus after His resurrection. He was saved by obeying the Lord’s law of pardon, the same law that you must obey if you are ever saved.

Summary

In all the cases of conversion, we do not read that it took a direct operation of the Spirit to convert ONE sinner. The people were converted by the power of God’s word, the Gospel. It is true that many were not converted, but it was not because of some power withheld; it was because of their own decision in the matter. The people that were saved heard the word, believed, repented, confessed their faith in Christ, and were baptized. This put them into the kingdom of God. This is the way we enter the kingdom today!

WE HAVE LEARNED, THEREFORE, THAT:

1. We are begotten of God by the word. (James 1:18)
2. The Holy Spirit has given the word. (John 15:26; 1 Peter 1:12)
3. The word is the seed of the kingdom. (Luke 8:11)
4. By the word, sinners are begotten. (1 Cor. 4:15)
5. We are begotten when we believe. (1 John 5:1; Rom. 10:17)
6. Then when we are baptized — brought forth from the water — according to the Spirit’s instructions, we are “born of water and of the Spirit.”
7. When we are “born again,” we are in the kingdom, saved, pardoned, a new creature, a child of God, a Christian.

Please note these scriptures relative to entrance into the kingdom:

1. John 3:5 — born again, enter the kingdom.
2. Matt. 18:3 — converted, enter the kingdom.
3. Matt. 7:21 — Do God’s will, enter the kingdom.

If one cannot understand “*born of water and of the Spirit,*” then maybe he can understand “conversion.” It is the same thing, for it brings the same

results — entrance into the kingdom. If “conversion” (a sinner turning to the Lord) cannot be understood, then doing the will of God can be. This is the same; this also results in entrance into the kingdom. A person cannot be a citizen of the kingdom who does not obey the will of God. All three are equal to the same thing, and must,

therefore, be equal to each other.

NOTE: We have three books available for free: (1) The 24 page, three part series, by Perry B. Cotham (1912-2013) on *“The New Birth” [How And When One Is Born Again]*, (2) A 69 page book by W. N. (Bill) Jackson

(1929-1991), *“That Ye May Grow Thereby,”* (3) An 80 page book by Tom House, *“Fundamentals of the Gospel Plan of Salvation.”* All three of these books are great evangelistic tools. Get some and pass them around (while supplies last). Send your request to: Seek The Old Paths, PO Box 7506, McMinnville, TN 37111.

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN: AN EVANGELISM MODEL

Scott Richards

We need to take full advantage of the excitement that new converts have to bring their friends and family to Christ.

While reading through the account of Jesus’ interactions with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (John 4:3-43), it occurred to me that it gives a blueprint for evangelism. Several important aspects of God’s plan to redeem man are demonstrated as well as some examples of how to go about bringing people to Christ.

Evangelism is not limited to any particular race, nationality or tribe. We cannot allow any personal prejudices to limit the scope of our efforts. Jesus talking with this woman powerfully demonstrates God’s desire for *“all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (1 Tim. 2:4). By speaking to a Samaritan Jesus breaks social and ethnic barriers. As she said, *“Jews have no dealings with Samaritans”* (John 4:9). When His disciples returned they, *“marveled that he talked with a woman”* (John 4:27). God’s grace, only found in the Christ, is available to all people. Later at Cornelius’ house, Peter proclaimed, *“Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him”* (Acts 10:34-35). The great commission leaves no place for racism or prejudice.

Jesus took a common physical need and used it to begin a conversation about the spiritual need of this woman. He said, *“If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water”* (John 4:10). While she failed to un-

derstand at first, she soon realized she was speaking with the Messiah. How often do we speak with people we don’t know and never say anything about Jesus or his church? How many times do we fail to sow a small seed that could develop into a personal Bible study with someone? Jesus demonstrates for us how to turn a physical conversation into a spiritual discussion and perhaps a Bible study will result.

Everyone is subject to the Gospel. Have you ever prejudged a person’s receptivity based upon what you knew about them? Unlike our Lord, when we meet someone new, we do not know their spiritual condition. The woman at the well was in a spiritual mess. Jesus knew all about the turmoil and trauma she experienced in life — five husbands and currently with another man! We might be inclined to give up on her without saying a word. God did not give up on David when he sinned with Bathsheba, nor did He give up on Saul when he stood by and held the coats of those who stoned Stephen. By reaching out to the Samaritan woman Jesus shows us that His redeeming blood can cleanse a person who seems hopelessly mired in sin — if they will repent and obey the Gospel.

The zeal of this woman resulted in many additional believers. After recognizing that Jesus was the much anticipated Messiah, she promptly forgets everything else, leaves her water pot and rushes back to the city to tell others about Jesus. Her excitement was contagious and as a

result the men of the city came out to meet Jesus themselves. They wanted to see if what the woman was saying was true. While *“...many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. ... many more believed because of his own word”* (John 4:39-41). There is a lesson in this for us. We need to take full advantage of the excitement that new converts have to bring their friends and family to Christ.

Our task is to do the will of God. After returning with food His disciples say to Jesus, *“Master eat,”* but our Lord replies, *“...I have meat to eat that ye know not of. ... my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work”* (John 4:31-34). The disciples exhibit the human preoccupation with the physical when they ask, *“Hath any man brought him ought to eat?”* Jesus responds, *“Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest”* (John 4:35).

Our Lord’s work was to *“...seek and to save that which was lost”* (Luke 19:10). Jesus’ work on earth was finished by His death, His burial and resurrection. We carry on His work when we enter the field and spread the Gospel of Christ with everyone we can. It requires us to “lift up our eyes” and see the harvest fields. We must boldly proclaim, “this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.”

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MIRACULOUS GIFTS — I CORINTHIANS CHAPTER TWELVE

Jon Gary Williams

It should be understood that miraculous gifts no longer exist, as well as the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit given to the apostles. All such miraculous powers ceased with the passing of the apostles and the arrival of what Paul called, “that which is perfect.”

Chapters twelve, thirteen and fourteen of I Corinthians, have to do with properly understanding the purpose of miraculous gifts. Chapter twelve *lists these gifts*, chapter thirteen *tells of their duration*, and chapter fourteen *tells how not to abuse them*, with emphasis given to misusing the gift of speaking in foreign languages.

The spirit of divisiveness, which permeates Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church, can be clearly seen in chapter twelve. Among the members there was envy over the relative importance of the miraculous gifts. Paul exposes the erroneous idea that some gifts were more important than others. Pride over possessing certain gifts had created contention and was harming the unity of the spiritual body of Christ.

No doubt, the purpose of these spiritual gifts was being overlooked. Some were making the claim their gifts were more important. The apostle’s message was for them to put away such nonsense. All of these gifts were important, no matter how less essential some may have appeared to be. Paul reminds them that though the gifts were diversified they all had a place to fill, having come by means of the same Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:5,6,11).

It should be understood that these miraculous gifts no longer exist, as well as the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit given to the apostles. All such miraculous powers ceased with the passing of the apostles and the arrival of what Paul called, “that which is perfect” (1 Cor. 13:8-10). The “perfect” thing was God’s final word to man, the “perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25; 2:12).

WHAT WERE THESE GIFTS?

In the first century church there was a need for the use of special powers. From the very beginning the apos-

gles exercised miraculous “signs” which helped in “confirming the word” they were proclaiming (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:3-4).

After the church was established, the ability to perform such miraculous powers was passed on to others by the “laying on of the apostles’ hands.” In Acts chapter six the apostles laid their hands on seven men, among whom were Stephen and Philip. We then read that Stephen, “*did great wonders and miracles among the people*” (Acts 6:8). Later we also see Philip performing miracles. “*And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did*” (Acts 8:6). Also, we read that after Paul had laid his hands on twelve new converts, “*they spake with tongues and prophesied*” (Acts 19:6). And, we also see how Simon was convinced that only through the laying on of the apostles’ hands could the Holy Spirit be given (Acts 8:18-19). These gifts were, of course, given to various, limited members of the church.

Paul’s list of miraculous gifts is found in three short verses (1 Cor. 12:8-10). Following is a brief rendering of each one.

(1) WORD OF WISDOM

Notice, this was not merely “wisdom,” but, “word of wisdom.” A preferred rendering would be, “a spoken utterance” of wisdom, which came by the direct influence of the Holy Spirit. One possessing this gift could reveal and speak new inspired truths. And, it is likely this wisdom played a role in the composing of the writings of the New Testament. Peter speaks to this by saying that the inspired writings of Paul were the result of, “*the wisdom given unto him*” (1 Peter 3:15-16). In Jerusalem, Jewish antagonists disputed Stephen’s preaching. Luke records, “*...they were not able to resist*

the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake” (Acts 6:10).

(2) WORD OF KNOWLEDGE

As above, notice this is not merely “knowledge,” but “word of knowledge.” Again, a preferred rendering would be, “a spoken utterance” of knowledge, coming by the direct influence of the Holy Spirit. This was the ability to know (perceive) inspired truths and to explain those truths. This could include, for example, the ability to explain messages of the Old Testament, and also the ability to identify and verify the inspired writings of the New Testament as they were being written and received.

(3) FAITH

Obviously, this was more than the faith by which Christians daily walk. Rather it was faith that showed special, amazing visible results. Paul spoke of such faith, in this instance a faith that could move mountains (1 Cor. 13:2; see Matt. 21:21). This miraculous faith would be seen as a wonder-working belief, a belief so strong that observers would find the results difficult to comprehend. It appears to demonstrate a special endowment of confidence in God. Compare also Mark 9:23.

(4) GIFTS OF HEALING

Notice that the word “gifts” is plural, involving a wide range of the miraculous healing of diseases and injuries. The book of Acts records several such cases of healing, in these instances by the apostles. In Jerusalem Peter and John healed a man lame from birth (Acts 3:2-11). And at Malita, Paul healed a man of dysentery (Acts 28:8).

(5) WORKING OF MIRACLES

Reaching into a broader area, it seems that “miracles” included much more than the gift of healing. Stephen

is said to have performed “*great wonders and miracles*” (Acts 6:8). This, no doubt, would include raising the dead. Paul restored life to the young man Eutychus (Acts 20:9-10) and Peter restored life to Tabitha (Acts 20:36-40). This could also include special miracles, such as items brought from Paul’s body and taken to heal people from diseases and to cast out demons (Acts 19:11-12), or not being harmed by the bite of a deadly serpent (Acts 28:3-6), or the blinding of Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13:8-11).

(6) PROPHECY

This category of prophecy is not the same as the work of the prophets associated with the apostles as part of the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:29). Agabus is such an example (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11). Though the gift of “prophecy” was not as eminent as the prophesying of the prophets, yet, it endowed its receivers with the power to foretell future events. The purpose of this gift was to encourage believers and to convince unbelievers of the Christian system. Such prophesying was foretold by Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17-18). The evangelist Philip is said to have had four daughters who possessed this gift (Act 21:9). At Corinth, those who possessed this gift were admonished to be orderly in speaking in their assemblies (1 Cor. 14:29-33).

(7) DISCERNING OF SPIRITS

This was the gift by which one could discern false claims of miracles, and expose those who used such “miracles” to promote false doctrines. With this gift one could determine whether a doctrine was genuine or counterfeit. The apostle John addressed the issue of exposing such false prophets (1 John 4:1). This reminds us of Old Testament passages showing how to deal with corrupt prophets (Deut. 18:22; Jer. 23:16).

(8) TONGUES

The gift of tongues was foretold in the Old Testament (Isa. 18:11; 1 Cor. 14:21). The word “tongues” simply means languages. Those with this gift could fluently speak languages in which they had not been educated. Such an ability would, of course, astound the hearers. This was evident on the day of Pentecost when the apostles spoke in the languages of

more than a dozen nations (Acts 2:4-8).

Apparently, at times in their assemblies, one with this gift might begin speaking in a foreign language. When this occurred it would have been needful for one with the gift of interpretation to interpret those words. But if no one was present with the gift of interpretation, it would be confusing, and especially so if non-believers were present.

In view of this, Paul cautioned the Corinthians about the proper use of tongues. He explained to them that tongue speaking was not for their own benefit, but was primarily for helping to convert the unbeliever. Rather, it was prophesying (preaching) which was most beneficial in their assemblies (1 Cor. 14:22-23). Paul also reminded them that those who spoke in “tongues” should do so in an orderly manner. He stressed that if there was no one present to interpret these words they should remain silent (1 Cor. 14:27-28).

(9) INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES

There were probably many instances when, in various assemblies, one with the gift of speaking in tongues, would begin speaking in a language some could not understand. This made it necessary for one who had the gift of interpreting tongues, to immediately interpret what was being spoken. This would remove unnecessary confusion. Also, this gift was a valuable tool in helping spread the Gospel to the lost of different nations.

ADDENDUM

As mentioned, the apostles possessed all these gifts. Paul, for example,

said he had the gift of speaking in tongues, the gift of prophecy, the gift of knowledge, and the gift of faith (1 Cor. 13:1-2). No doubt, having received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the power the apostles possessed far exceeded that of others (Acts 1:5; 2:4).

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We are pleased to announce the new **International Bible Teaching Ministries (IBTM)** video is available to view: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpyvUV4V92k&t=86s>. Please take time to watch this informative resource and help us get the word out. We also encourage you to link the URL to your church webpage and provide it in your church bulletin. If you have a personal social media account, we request that you consider posting the link on your social media page. It is our prayer that this new media tool will help us to get the word out about the effective evangelistic efforts of **IBTM**. Since September 2007 through May 2023, there have been 41,430 baptisms; 39,006 restorations; 786 new congregations started; and 849 preachers trained to preach the Gospel.





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in Tyler, Sherry Bickham, Troup, TX. “We really appreciate what you do” ...**Clanton, AL.** “I would like to thank the congregation and the elders of the church of Christ at Leoni for the publication you put out, *Seek The Old Paths*. I look forward to receiving it each and every month. Thank you all so much for STOP and sending it to even a person like myself. If I could, I would like to ask the church to pray for my family, my dad and mom, to give them strength and encourage them. For each of my brothers and sisters to study the word and gain a richer knowledge of God’s word and to also encourage each of them. For all my nephews and nieces as they are young, a few of them are starting families. I would like for you to pray for each of them to study God’s word and to live God fearing obedient lives. They are all great blessings! I would also ask your prayers for my sister-in-law and also my brother-in-law. They have each lost their fathers that were very good men. Please ask God to comfort them and let them know they are loved very much. Please also pray for this nation that we may turn from our evil, liberal ways and to put leaders in that will stand for what is right. Our nation has been very blessed, especially by all the young men that gave their lives for us all so we can be free. Please pray for our nation. Most of all, I want to ask for your prayers for Christ’s church that he died for to be a beacon of light and to stand in these liberal times. Thank you all so much. Again I want to thank you for *Seek The Old Paths*. It has a huge impact on so many. Please keep up the good work and God bless you all. I thank God for you all!” ...**Jonathan Tate, Hodgen, OK.**

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