

The Giving of the Holy Spirit (part 2)

Acts 2:1—4

Confusion, poor doctrine, human tradition and emotions are all evident when it comes to defining what people believe about the beginning of today's church. Most people know what they believe about the beginning of the church, but many have no idea how to defend what they believe. They will usually go to someone they trust and use them for their "Bible" instead of doing the hard work of actually studying Scripture on their own. Usually, people already have a pre-conceived idea and use Scripture to prove they are right. Worse than that, they stand upon the traditions set forth by men they trust. This is true even among so-called scholars and professors who should know better. It could be called lazy theology.

There are several ideas being promoted as to the beginning of the church. Probably the most common is the Covenant/Reformed idea that the church began in Genesis and continues to this day as the "people of God." The second most common is among dispensationalists who believe that the church began in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost. Finally, also among dispensationalists, is the belief that the church began sometime later than Acts 2, often in Acts 9, 13 or 28.

Unfortunately, there is more bad doctrine than good when it comes to determining when the church actually began. Since bad doctrine only begets bad doctrine, the truth becomes concealed and falsehood prevails. Hopefully we can cut through the clutter and discover how rightly dividing Scripture can help make sense of all this.

Continuation or new program?

One big step in determining the true beginning of the church is to understand whether Acts 2 is a continuation of an existing program, or if it is the introduction of a brand new program. This obviously assumes that God does change His dealing with mankind over the years. It seems obvious that He does, and even Covenant Theologians break down their system into two dispensations, Grace and Law with the division made at the introduction of sin into the world. By first understanding the difference between Israel's prophetic program and Paul's Mystery program, and separating them into two completely different and distinct programs, I believe it is possible to see that Acts 2 is a continuation of the Gospels.

Christ's death, a shame to Israel

Before Acts 2, Jesus came to Israel (Matthew 15:24) to die for Israel (Matthew 20:28; John 1:11) so that Israel could bring the Gospel to the Gentiles (John 4:22; Isaiah 2:3). When Peter preached Jesus Christ's death on the cross, it was a shame to Israel (Acts 2:23; 3:13—15). It was a symbol of Israel's failure to accept their Messiah. Paul, however, upholds the cross as a thing of glory (Galatians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 1:18). It was a picture of Jesus Christ's triumph over sin and Satan, and no longer pointed to Israel's failure. Since Peter condemned Israel in early Acts, it shows a continuation of Israel's prophetic program.

The gospel

If we look at the plan of salvation, we can see how Peter's message aligned perfectly with Jesus' way of salvation. Peter called for repentance and baptism as the means of salvation. This is the same gospel preached by John the Baptist (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3) who came in the name of the Father to announce Jesus Christ (John 1:6—8). This is the message the Disciples were to preach after Jesus Christ ascended into heaven (Matthew 28:19—20). The Apostle Paul preached the message of believing in the Person and work of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1—4). Paul said Christ did not send him to baptize, but to preach the Gospel. Peter continued Jesus' earthly ministry while the Apostle Paul proclaimed a brand new ministry given to him by the risen and glorified Jesus Christ. Acts 2 is once again a continuation.

Continuation of prophecy

God was dealing with Israel through a prophetic program. Her future was laid out perfectly in Daniel with many details fleshed out in the Old Testament prophets and New Testament books like Revelation. Peter acknowledged they were still operating under Israel's prophetic program by explaining the events using the prophet Joel (Acts 2:14—21), King David (Acts 2:25—30) and other prophets (Acts 3:17—21, 24). Peter spoke by the word of the prophets concerning Israel, while Paul spoke by the mouth of Jesus Christ concerning the church, the Body of Christ (Galatians 1:1. 11). The Old Testament prophets said absolutely nothing about the formation of the Church, the Body of Christ because it was a Mystery, hidden until God revealed it through Paul (Romans 16:25—26; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:26).

Message to the nation Israel

One thing often missed by students of the Bible is the different relationship God had with Israel than He does with the Church, the Body of Christ. Israel had a covenant relationship with God, meaning He chose the entire nation as His own to carry out His purpose to the world (Deuteronomy 7:6; Romans 9:4—5). However, all of Israel was not saved, unlike members of the Body of Christ. Many in Israel turned away from God by not following the commandments. To become right with God required that Israel, as a nation, repent of her sins and return to God. When Solomon prayed/prophesied, he said that Israel needed to obey the Law or God would send plagues upon them. If that happened, then Israel would need to repent and return to God and He would heal the land (2 Chronicles 7:12—14). This was in line with Leviticus 26 and is the formula Daniel used when he prayed (Daniel 9:1—11).

We in the church, the Body of Christ, are never told to pray for the healing of our nation to get right with God. We come to God as individuals and we are forgiven as individuals. Peter, on the other hand, calls for the nation of Israel to repent so that the Millennial Kingdom can be set up (Acts 3:19). This is a clear indication that Peter was continuing Israel's prophetic program just as Jesus had done.

Three calls to repentance

Israel was given three calls to repent. The first was at the hand of John the Baptist speaking on behalf of the Father (John 1:6). The second was the testimony of Jesus Christ coming to earth with the Good news of the Kingdom (John 5:23; 10:36). The third call to Israel was through Stephen speaking for the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:55). Israel blasphemed the Holy Spirit by rejecting His spokesman, Stephan. They were given no other opportunities to repent because blasphemy of the Holy Spirit would not be forgiven (Luke 12:10). The call for Israel to repent did not happen until at least a full year after the giving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Israel still had the opportunity to repent on Pentecost, but soundly rejected it.

Israel's feasts

The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) was given to Israel and relates only to Israel historically, spiritually and prophetically. Pentecost is not related to the formation of the Church, the Body of Christ. Pentecost speaks of the coming of the Spirit to Israel (Isaiah 32:15; Ezekiel 36:27). It was fulfillment of prophecy.

Baptism in the Spirit

Those who say the church began in Acts 2 make no distinction between the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Israel with baptism into Christ by the Holy Spirit (Romans 6:3; 1 Corinthians 12:13). They were baptized into the Spirit while we were baptized into Christ by the Spirit. This can be shown by understanding that baptism is identification. When Israel was baptized in the Holy Spirit, they were identified by the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, when we are baptized into Christ, we are identified with Him, being crucified, buried and risen with Him (Romans 6:4—7; Colossians 2:12). The giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost had nothing to do with us today.

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