

## Converts of Apollos learn of the Fullness of the Spirit – Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.

- 1 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,
- 2 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.
- 3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.
- 4 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.
- 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
- 6 And when Paul had laid *his* hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.
- 7 And all the men were about twelve. (1 Corinthians 19:1-7, KJB)

On his third missionary journey, Paul passed through Galatia and Phrygia and returned to the great city of Ephesus. As we read above, there he finds certain disciples to whom he asked, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?"

Now in New Testament times one who was saved would normally have been taught about the fullness of the Spirit. It was a matter in which the people should not have been confused.

It is unfortunate that there has been great and unnecessary confusion as well as false teaching concerning the fullness of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Some teach that Pentecost was the origin of the church and miss the whole point entirely by supposing it was some dispensational matter.

But the Bible neither mentions nor hints that the church originated at Pentecost. God says nothing about Pentecost being the birthday of the church, and we should not miss what God does say by insisting on what He does not say. Indeed, some have supposed that Pentecost meant *a second work of grace*, the burning out of the old carnal nature, the dying of the sinful disposition in those already saved. But again, the Bible says nothing to that effect. There is a Bible doctrine of sanctification, but it is not taught in connection with Pentecost.

Still others stress that tongues or miraculous languages were the initial evidence of the fullness of the Spirit. These miss the fact that Jesus said the purpose of being baptized with the Holy Spirit (His "coming *upon*" them) was to receive power to witness concerning Him (Acts 1:4-8) and that such was given on the day of Pentecost when about 3,000 were added to the Church.

Again, the Scofield Bible, normally a useful reference Bible, misses the mark in discussing the disciples of Acts 19:1-7. The Scofield note says, "Paul was evidently impressed by the absence of spirituality and power in these so-called disciples. Their answer brought out the fact that they were Jewish proselytes, disciples of John the Baptist, looking forward to a coming King, not Christians looking backward to an accomplished redemption."

Now Acts 18:24-28 tells us of an eloquent Jew of Alexandria named Apollos who was instructed in the way of the Lord, fervent in spirit, and mighty in the scriptures. This man came to Ephesus before Paul's return and boldly spoke in the synagogue where he was heard by Aquila and his wife Pricilla. At this time Apollos knew only the baptism and message of John the Baptist, which was: **(1)** "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:3), **(2)** to repent "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat.3:2), and **(3)** that Jesus was "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the World" (John 1:29). Such was a true God honoring message, but John was slain before the Cross and resurrection of Christ. Hence, as they are the very heart of the New Covenant gospel, John's message was not the New Testament message.

The Baptist did not offer a different plan of salvation from that of Jesus. Such is completely unfounded. In Acts 10:43 Peter said to Cornelius: "To him (Christ) give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins."

Therefore the Old Testament plan of salvation was exactly the same as that of the New Testament – faith in the Messiah. Again, the New Testament clearly teaches this for it is said that God proclaimed the gospel to Abraham – that through Abraham’s seed (singular! i.e., the Messiah: see Gal. 3:16) all nations would be blessed (Gal. 3:8; cp. Gen. 22:18). There has always been but one plan of salvation. This is because the all wise God devised the perfect and only plan before the foundation of the world. The difference is that the Old Testament saints looked *forward* to the coming of Messiah Jesus: the New Testament saints *look back* in time to His finished work of atonement and redemption on the Cross. Thus, even though John was the last Old Testament prophet, he still would not have preached a different way of salvation.

The problem before us is that, without the Cross and Resurrection in his message, John the Baptist’s converts were saved, but they were Old Testament saved. This means that, like him, they did not have the indwelling Holy Spirit for their *permanent* possession, which is true of all New Covenant believers. The Spirit was only said to be *with* the Old Testament saints <sup>1</sup>

As John’s disciple, Apollos was himself still only Old Testament saved when he converted the Ephesian 12. This changed when Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos aside and gave “him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26). Now, having the NT gospel of the Cross and Resurrection, the Holy Spirit came to dwell *within* him, and Apollos became partaker of the New and better Covenant (Heb. 8:6). He now had a more powerful and complete message at Acts 18:28.

This was the same problem Paul encountered when he met the “about” 12 Ephesians. They too were saved but still had not heard the New Covenant gospel, and therefore did not have the Holy Spirit permanently *indwelling* them. This would have been true of many saints during the first years after the Resurrection. Paul’s conversation with the 12 obviously included that they were “believers” (vs. 2) and baptism was also discussed (vs. 3), yet the exchange would clearly have lacked their saying anything about the Cross, Resurrection, Ascension or Pentecost. Such omissions would surely have caught Paul’s attention. “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed” (vs. 2) was thus his natural inquiry. Their answer would clarify whether they were Old or New Covenant saints. Being aware of this potential problem and undoubtedly suspecting from the dialogue that they were the former, Paul was led to pose the Acts 19:2 question.

When they told Paul all they had received was John’s baptism, he knew that the extent of their knowledge was the same as John’s, which was only that the Messiah had come (John 1:29-36). They did not know that Christ had died, been buried, risen from the dead, ascended back to heaven and that he had sent the Holy Spirit with a new message and ministry (John 14:16-20, 16:7-14). Paul then instructed them further concerning Christ Jesus and, having believed His gospel, they were *again* water baptized – only this time it was “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:3-5). They were now partakers of the New Covenant and had the *indwelling* Holy Spirit, but Paul was not finished with them! After this, the Apostle then “laid his hands upon them, the Spirit came on (ἐπι = upon) them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied” (vs. 6).

All this took place only about a year after Paul first came to Ephesus, while on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19-21). Now whereas it is true that these gifts of the Holy Spirit are often greatly abused and even counterfeited in today’s places of worship (both by people and the Devil), there are also some who overreact and strongly oppose His gifts. Most of these latter point to the Church at Ephesus as being the ideal NT assembly, yet they do not seem to notice that at least 12 of its first members spoke with tongues and prophesied. As no corrections concerning the use of the *charismata* gifts are found in the letter to the Ephesians, we conclude that, unlike the Corinthian Church, the gifts of the Holy Spirit were under His control and carried out in an orderly manner at Ephesus. Selah.

---

<sup>1</sup> John 14:17. The “with” here is the Greek “παρ” = par, which is short for παρακλητος: English = *parakletos*. It means an advocate or comforter that walks along one’s side to help and guide them.