

Chapter 3

The Power Of Pentecost

Acts 2:1-47

Since the entire Bible is literally true and contains the very Word of God, all attempts to translate and interpret its text should be made using the highest degree of hermeneutical accuracy. Nowhere is this accuracy more needed than in a study of the second chapter of the book of Acts. This is not to devalue any other portion of the Word of God; however, a proper understanding of this chapter of Scripture is vital to every believer. The reason such a careful investigation of this chapter is so critical is because so many different Christian denominations have built much of their doctrine around their understanding of this chapter. The existence of such a wide diversity of interpretation of the text of this chapter demands a closer and more literal examination of the events herein described. Realizing the Holy Spirit is not confused in what He inspired to be written, there are not many different meanings to be found in this chapter. There may be many different interpretations; however, there is only one correct interpretation. In light of this sobering truth, every effort will be made to accurately translate and interpret the words of this chapter.

Many read this chapter and ascribe to it strange and almost mystical meaning that seems to be contradicted in other passages of Scripture. Some see the gifts given to this church as a confirmation that an individual is really saved; therefore, those who do not have these gifts are manifestly lost. Others, not willing to go that far, see different levels of salvation wherein one who has made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, yet, has not received these gifts, is only partly saved. Logic will demand that all of these theological

positions cannot be true; therefore, a close examination of this chapter is necessary.

The church Jesus built during His personal ministry was given only one thing to do until they received the promised power and that was to wait. As seen in the previous chapter, waiting proved to be difficult for these folk, especially Peter. They had inappropriately elected a new Apostle; however, there is no record of Jesus scolding this church. This is so often the case with believers today when they view waiting as a totally useless inactivity; yet, the work accomplished without direction is so often utterly useless.

The Strange Events Of Pentecost: Verses 1-13:

Verse 1 states: “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.” The day of Pentecost was observed fifty days following the Passover feast, and many of the Jews who lived abroad would stay in Jerusalem from Passover to Pentecost before returning to their homes.

It is very interesting to note that Luke had already stated in verse three of chapter one the fact Jesus had been seen by the Apostles for forty days following His resurrection. If the days Jesus spent in the tomb are added to the forty days following the resurrection, Jesus had only been gone for approximately seven days when Pentecost arrived. Such a short time, yet, it must have seemed a lifetime to the members of this church Jesus started. Surely, they could have waited, in faith, for a week; however, while waiting and praying, they had already violated Jesus’ command to wait. There is no indication this group even realized their error in electing a replacement for Judas. Having accomplished this “service” for the Lord, they returned to praying and waiting longingly for Jesus to return.

The phrase translated in the King James version of the Bible “they were all with one accord in one place” is the Greek phrase “*hsan pantej omou/ epi. to. auto*”. A literal translation will prove helpful in determining the condition of this church. This phrase is translated “they were all being together upon the same thing (or place) (dh)”. Much has been made of the phrase “in one accord” in attempting to establish unity of spirit and purpose within this church. While that position might, indeed, have been true, it seems the neuter demonstrative pronoun “*auto*” has reference to their location. While it is possible the members of this church may have been totally united in their faith, it seems more likely they were united more by apprehension and fear than in spirit and purpose. Yes, they would wait but the waiting would be very unsettling; however, they were all in one place. Yes they remembered the “promise of the Father”; however, they were unsure as to what this would be like or when the promise would come.

Verses two and three are two of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible; therefore, they demand special attention. With the members of this church all together, filled with apprehension and fear, God was about to move. The King James text reads: “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.” Suddenly, and without warning, there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind. Notice, this was not a rushing mighty wind, but only the sound of a rushing mighty wind. While living in the southern part of the United States, the author has experienced the destructive power of a rushing mighty wind, otherwise known as a tornado. Such destruction caused by this weather phenomenon would literally destroy the house and harm or kill those inside. It is, therefore, very important to notice the text says that only the sound

of a rushing mighty wind was heard, not the devastating effects of a rushing mighty wind. Without question, this sound, though not accompanied by the actual wind itself, would be sufficient to cause great fear: there was no physical presence of the rushing mighty wind. Nevertheless, this great sound was enough to get the attention of this group.

The sound of such a mighty rushing wind, even without the expected destruction, would impress on these people the fact that God was working in this phenomenon. The sound could hardly be kept from filling completely the entire house. All who were present heard this strange noise and were, no doubt, fearful as they wondered what would happen next. Surely, they must have thought, the real impact of a mighty rushing wind would follow immediately. The main concept at this point is that this was an audio, and not a visual, phenomenon.

As these members of the church that Jesus built, and authorized to represent Him until He returned, waited in fear and apprehension, the events described in verse three followed. The text states: “And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.”

Once again, because of the common misunderstanding of this verse, it will be profitable to examine the actual wording of the Greek text. The phrase “*kai. wfqhsan autoij*” translated “and there appeared unto them” is an accurate translation. The verb “*wfqhsan*” is a first aorist passive voice form which has the sense of “appear” or “see”. Now, it seems the sense of this phenomenon has been changed from audio to visual; however, it shall be demonstrated that the subject of this verb is the word “*glwssai*” (*glossai*) and it is translated “tongues”. This is an acceptable translation of this word if the context is unknown; however, the immediate context will reveal another ac-

ceptable translation. This second translation is “languages” (glossa, from which the English word glossary is derived), and it is in this sense that the physical appearance of literal tongues would not be seen, but only heard and understood. Languages cannot be seen, except by means of writing the words and letters on some surface. They can further be perceived or understood if someone speaks the language. In other words, the disciples became aware of a phenomenon in which they saw others of their assembly speak in languages they had not learned! Thayer writes regarding this word: “a tongue, i.e. the language used by a particular people in distinction from that of other nations:” (Thayer, 1981, p. 118). This phenomenon was observable, not by some dramatic visual effect; rather, by an understandable audio effect of hearing men, untrained in foreign language, speak such foreign words.

These languages are next seen as “cloven” in the King James text. The word for “cloven” is the Greek word “*diamerizomenai*” which is a present middle participle. Again, Thayer writes regarding this word: “to divide;...in pass. To be divided into opposing parts...to distribute...Mid. To distribute among themselves:” (Thayer, 1981, p. 140). These languages (tongues) are seen, or perceived, as “dividing themselves” in such an unpredictable way that can only be described “like fire”. Anyone who has sat by the side of a campfire or fireplace can attest to the unpredictability of the visible tongues of fire as they rise and fall. It is precisely in this same unpredictable fashion that these languages were manifest. The participle is in the passive voice indicating this phenomenon was being manipulated by an unseen hand. The disciples certainly were not controlling the distribution of these languages.

The next phrase “and it sat upon each of them” is a translation

of the Greek words “*kai. ekaqisen efl eha ekaston autwh*”. The verb translated “it sat” is a first aorist third person singular form of the Greek word “*kaqizw*” which according to Thayer has the meaning of “to make to sit down, to set, appoint.” (Thayer, 1981, p. 313. In this context, the sense of “select or appoint” would make the meaning more clear. One might wonder why the singular tense is used since the reference is to “tongues”, or “languages”. The most logical interpretation would be that this phenomenon itself would be referred to in the singular number. In other words, as the unpredictable ability to speak in languages they had not learned was manifested, the total impact of the miracle was referred to in the singular. Indeed, each one of the members of this church was indiscriminately selected to speak in a different language.

Clearly, this was no small miracle and, no doubt, the disciples were puzzled. This miracle must be related back to “the promise of the Father” to which Jesus referred in verse four of chapter one. In this reference, Jesus reminded the disciples of the fact the Holy Spirit, in His role as “Comforter” or “helper”, would soon empower this church and that was precisely what happened here. To ascribe this great miracle to some demonstration of spirituality only with no coherent and intelligent message, is to miss the point. How often, today, the so-called gift of tongues is used for emotional outbursts with no coherent message. One must ever remember the purpose of the “Comforter” was to help this church do the work Jesus had assigned them. This work is not an incoherent emotional outburst; indeed, the Apostle Paul said in First Corinthians 14:22: “Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying *serveth* not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.” In this quote, Paul used

the same word (glossa) used in verse three. Paul refuted the notion that this gift was to be used among believers because it would be of no value, particularly if they spoke the same language!

Verse four continues to make the sense clearer for it states: “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” The concept of “being filled with the Holy Spirit” needs to be examined at this point. Indeed, some see this filling with the Holy Spirit as being a process by which the Holy Spirit takes over all control of the believer to the point where he has no choice but to follow. In the book of Ephesians 5:18, however, the Apostle Paul gives a further sense of this filling with the Holy Spirit when he stated: “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;” Paul was writing to the members of the church in Ephesus. In discussing how the believers there could live the life Jesus desired for them, Paul told these folk, who were already saved and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, to be “filled with the Spirit.” Now, this instruction to the members of this particular church was given in the imperative mood; therefore, these people could chose to allow, or prevent, this “filling with the Holy Spirit.”

This condition of being “filled with the Spirit,” was compared to that of “being drunk with wine.” When one becomes drunk with wine, it is because of a voluntary action, and the individual comes under the control of the effect of the wine. He behaves in a way that generally is unlike his behavior when he is sober. In like manner, the believer is to fully, and voluntarily, allow himself to come under the influence of the Holy Spirit. In this situation, the believer would yield himself voluntarily to the control of the Holy Spirit, and, in this condition, the believer would behave differently than when he was not allowing the

Holy Spirit to control his life.

In light of this Biblical example, one can see these believers voluntarily gave control of their lives to the Holy Spirit of God. There was no coercion or annulling of the free moral agency of these believers; rather, they demonstrated an attitude of submission to the Lord. In this condition of submitting to the will of God, all of these believers “began to speak with other tongues (languages).” What a strange experience! These men, who had not studied foreign languages, were able to speak, clearly and coherently, in many different languages. How could they do this? The answer lies in the last phrase of this verse “as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

The picture is now clear, these believers were waiting for the “promise of the Father”, and though they did not know what to expect, were willing to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit. God will always bless and use such believers in a very special way. Indeed, God has no shortage of power; however, He does have a shortage of believers who are willing to give Him total control over their lives. As they give Him total control of their lives, He will use them in an effective manner to live and proclaim His Word. The fact must be stressed here that this “filling with the Holy Spirit” was only possible because of the voluntary spirit of the believers in this church.

Although to the other individual members of this church, one of their number speaking a different language would have seemed to be speaking meaningless sounds; however, the message spoken was intelligent and coherent to those who spoke that particular language.

The reason for the disciples’ ability to speak in languages they had not previously learned becomes apparent in verses five through seven which state:

“And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans?”

Now, the purpose of this miracle of Pentecost becomes crystal clear. There were “at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.” These Jews, who were living across the face of the whole earth, had come to Jerusalem to worship God. They had traveled from their home countries to observe the feast of Passover and they would normally stay through the feast of Pentecost. No doubt, many, if not most, of these people no longer spoke or understood the Greek or Hebrew languages. It is clear God was interested in all of these folk understanding the works and words of Jesus the Messiah. The members of the church at Jerusalem would hardly have been able to communicate with these people unless God gave them the supernatural ability. As this phenomenon was heard and understood by these foreign speaking Jews, there was no small stir among the people. The crowd knew these men who were speaking these foreign languages were simple Galileans; therefore, their sudden ability to coherently speak in other languages caused quite a stir.

It must be emphasized that this miraculous gift was given to the members of this local church only. Certainly, many others in Israel had been saved and received baptism at the hand of John the Baptist; yet, only those, who had followed through on their statement of commitment when they were baptized and actually committed themselves to serving the Lord together, were given

this miracle. Also, it was not given to demonstrate they were super spiritual, but to fill a logical and coherent need. The people needed to hear about the Messiah and that His name was Jesus. This was not just an emotional experience for there was meaning and purpose for the gift. So often today, many who claim to have this “gift” exercise it among people who speak the same language as a sign of being spiritual. This action is a perversion and misrepresentation of the miracle of Pentecost. There was meaning, logic, and purpose to this miracle. The miracle was not designed to bring any particular honor or glory to these believers, but only to God! This was an amazing miracle, not a meaningless emotional experience.

Verses 8-11 complete the account of this, once and for all time, empowering of the churches of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit in His role as “Comforter” or “helper” in their work. These verses state:

“And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,

Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

What a strange, but powerful, method for God to communicate a very logical and coherent message to people who desperately needed it. These Jews were described as “devout” and they had come to Jerusalem for the specific purpose of worshipping God and were anxiously awaiting the Messiah. While

many commentaries assume most, if not all, of these foreign speaking Jews were lost, there is little evidence of this condition. Some will immediately argue that some of these men may have actually participated in the demand that Jesus be crucified and, thus, could not possibly be saved. The logic of this argument will not stand the scrutiny of examination since such logic would require that God annul free moral agency once an individual has been saved. This concept is not found on the pages of the Bible; in fact, it is possible for a believer to embrace any sort of error, or practice all manner of ungodly behavior without losing his salvation!

The misunderstanding of the concept that salvation has nothing to do with religion, as discussed in the previous chapter, has driven the interpretation of this chapter. The last phrase of verse 11, however, gives the essence and meaning of this Pentecostal gift when it states: "...we do hear them speak in our_tongues the wonderful works of God." The message spoken by these Galileans was not a meaningless sound, but, a very clear announcement of the wonderful works of God. What message could be more meaningful for these "devout" men who came to Jerusalem for the specific purpose of worshipping God?

These verses represent a complete and total fulfillment of the promise Jesus made to His apostles regarding the coming "Comforter" to assist and help His churches. Devaluing this notable miracle to a behavior that honors none but the one speaking is to sully the very name of God! The apostle Paul addressed this misuse and abuse of this gift in writing to the church at Corinth when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:18-23:

"I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all:

Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that *by my voice* I might teach

others also, than ten thousand words in an *unknown* tongue.

Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

In the law it is written, With *men of* other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord.

Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying *serveth* not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.

If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those that are* unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?"

The Bible clearly teaches, "God is not the author of confusion." It further states "God is a jealous God and will not share His glory with another." In light of the text, the miracle of Pentecost is best understood by the fact God used the members of this church to communicate to the hearers "the wonderful works of God." The church members, who were blessed to be a conduit through which "the wonderful works of God" were communicated, were not the main attraction; God was! There is no place in Christianity for the honoring of men; rather, all activity and words must honor the king!

Having examined the miracle of Pentecost, it is interesting to notice the response by those who witnessed this strange event. Verses 12-13 state: "And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine." The one common response

evoked by this great miracle was that all who heard were amazed. This was truly something they had never seen or experienced before; further, they did not quite know the exact reason for this miracle. In fact, they vocalized their complete lack of understanding regarding this phenomenon. If, indeed, many of these were saved people, the only reason for their doubt and confusion was they had not experienced, and did not expect, God to do such a notable miracle. Before the reader is tempted to disparage these folk, he must remember all of the times in his own life when he had no expectation that God could or would do the unexpected. This condition of doubt and confusion is frequently the response of believers today; at least, these people were open to ask the meaning of this miracle.

In addition to the people who were amazed and doubtful, there were others who observed the same phenomenon and made a hasty conclusion that these men were all drunk. To these, who expected nothing from God, there was not even an acknowledgement of the possibility that God was working in these events. To them such action by God was impossible. Perhaps, this condition may speak more to the religion than salvation of men who were so quick to condemn these believers. Behavior perceived to be outside the norm of daily life was to be rejected, and, only things that fit the pre-understanding of their interpretation of the Scriptures were possible. Again, this was not a sign of a lack of salvation; rather, only the fog created by a lack of proper perception regarding the power of God.

The Sermon By Peter: Verses 14-42:

Upon hearing the false accusation of these men who concluded that the members of this church were drunken, Peter rose to defend and explain the actions. Peter affirmed that these were not drunk in

verses 14-15, which state:

“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:

For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is *but* the third hour of the day.”

Peter here affirmed these disciples were not drunk. He appealed to their knowledge of those who were prone to drink when he reminded them that it was only the third hour (9:00 A.M.). This information, of itself, would not be conclusive proof they were not drunk; however, it would be most unnatural for men to become drunk before dark. It seems most drunkenness occurs after dark. Perhaps, the words of Jesus will shed some light on Peter’s argument. He said in John 3:19: “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

Continuing his defense of the actions of himself and the rest of the members of this church, Peter then attributed this notable miracle to the fulfillment of prophecy found in the book of Joel. His application is found in verse 16–21 which state:

“But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke:

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come:

And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

These religiously devout men, whether saved or lost, would have been somewhat familiar with the prophecy of Joel. Peter reminded them of, perhaps, a long lost but correct meaning of the message of God through Joel. It is sad, but not uncommon, for believers today to attempt to explain away any reference in the Bible to the great power of God. Evidently, such was the condition of these religiously devout men; yes, Peter said those things, which these men saw, manifested a fulfillment of Bible prophecy!

This explanation of the miracle of Pentecost served as an introduction for Peter’s famous sermon on the Day of Pentecost. He moved to the first point of his sermon in verse 22 which states: “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:” The emphasis of Peter’s message was Jesus, and the fact He was indeed the Messiah. In this verse, Peter told these religiously devout men that Jesus of Nazareth was “a man approved of God.” Jesus had claimed to be the Messiah during His personal ministry, yet, most did not believe. Peter, therefore, told these folk the events they had just witnessed was a fulfillment of prophecy and the prophecy had to do with the Messiah. At this point Peter made no bold affirma-

tion that Jesus was, indeed, the Messiah; he simply told them Jesus was a man approved of God. In other words Jesus had the stamp of approval from God in all He had done. They had surely heard about the miracles and wonders Jesus had performed before His crucifixion. The approval of God upon Jesus was manifest, specifically, by those miracles, wonders, and signs.

There was a specific reason and purpose for miracles. In the specific case of Jesus Christ, the miracles He performed validated the fact He was from God. Nicodemus acknowledged this truth in John 3:2 which states: “The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.” There exists a common misconception that miracles were performed solely for the benefit of the one on whom the miracle was performed. If that were the only reason for miracles performed by Jesus, then those who were healed, or raised from the dead would still be alive today! The fallacy of that position is obvious; yet, many today seem transfixed on the miracle working power of Jesus Christ. One must understand that Jesus came and died for the sins of the world so that all men would have the opportunity to have their sins forgiven, not just so people could enjoy good physical health. If a lost man experienced a miraculous physical healing by Jesus and never trusted Jesus as his personal savior, he would die eternally lost. In that case the miracle would be of little value during the physical life of the individual and of no eternal value. Thus, miracles served a unique and logical purpose, to validate the message and the messenger, Jesus Christ. Later, miracles would serve to validate the message and messengers of New Testament churches. In other words, the truth of the message and the messenger were the important purpose

of miracles. Yes, miracles served to arouse and excite the observers; yet, that was simply to confirm the truth taught.

Peter then moved to the second point of his sermon in verse 23 which states: “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:” Peter then fearlessly affirmed the fact these men had played a role in crucifying this Jesus, a man approved of God. They were indeed guilty of this evil deed even if they had not given tacit approval of the crucifixion. In reality, Jesus died for the sins of every human that has, or will ever live. This great truth includes all men of every age. Jesus, the very son of God died specifically for their sins. It was not for any sin that He committed, but the sins of all men. In this point, Peter was absolutely correct. All humanity must stand condemned for the crucifixion of Jesus.

Having made his second point painfully clear, Peter then moved to the third point of his sermon in verses 24-28 which state:

“Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved:

Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope:

Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.”

It must be remembered that Jesus of Nazareth was the subject

of this discussion. Peter immediately focused on the reality of His resurrection as prophesied in Psalm 16:8-11. In this point, Peter was affirming the reality that Jesus was, indeed, the Messiah because He was resurrected from the dead. The Apostle Paul affirmed the validating truth of the resurrection of Jesus in Romans 1:3-4 which state: “Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:” Peter’s third point not only stated the fact of the resurrection of Jesus, but that His resurrection was validation of the fact He was the Messiah! This powerful sermon was then pressed on by Peter in verses 29-31 which state:

“Men *and* brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day.

Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne;

He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.”

Peter was bold to proclaim the truth that the Messiah was to be raised from the dead. He realized the fact that he was treading on sacred, but misunderstood, ground as he asked for their indulgence in pressing the fact that Jesus met Biblical criteria for the Messiah. The truth that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah was now logically and powerfully proven in verses 32-36, which state:

“This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all

are witnesses.

Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,

Until I make thy foes thy footstool.

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

The power and logic of Peter’s sermon was now manifest with the force of Scripture. Peter affirmed boldly that the Scripture, with which these religiously devout men were familiar, proved that this Jesus was, indeed, the Messiah! He then concluded his sermon with an unambiguous affirmation that Jesus was the Christ. It seems odd today that some Christians think that Christ is the last name of Jesus. The word Christ means “the anointed one, or the Messiah.” A very insightful way to read the New Testament is to insert the title “Messiah” whenever the name “Christ” appears. Thus, Jesus Christ is understood correctly as “Jesus Messiah.” This understanding will add the great dignity that is due the Lord Jesus Messiah. Having firmly stated his third point, Peter then waited for their response. Notice, Peter did not give an invitation, or press an appeal for a “decision” from these men. He simply and powerfully proved that Jesus was the anxiously awaited Messiah of Israel.

As always, when the Word of God is accurately preached, the Holy Spirit will empower the message to the convicting of the hearers. The response to Peter’s sermon was now squarely in the

hands of these religiously devout men. Their response is recorded in verse 37 that states: “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?” Clearly, the Holy Spirit (Comforter) had done exactly what Jesus had promised he would do when He came. He had convicted (reproved) these folk of their sin, the righteousness of Jesus and the coming judgment. Certainly, the greatest need of lost men is knowledge of their lost condition; however, the need for saved people who are embracing error is to be shown the truth.

Peter had preached a sermon in which he proved conclusively that Jesus was the Messiah and these men had killed Him, but God had raised Him from the dead. Convinced by the Holy Spirit of the truth of this sermon, they responded with a question that indicated they knew of their guilt. The question seems to be a probe to determine if there was anything that could be done since they were guilty of killing their Messiah. They might have expected a response of condemnation from Peter.

The spiritual condition of these men needs to be explored. If they were lost, they needed information regarding how they might have access to the grace of God procured for them by the Messiah. If, however, they were saved, but in error, they needed to know how they could be forgiven of killing the Messiah and instructions regarding proper service to Him. Peter’s answer gives powerful insight into the spiritual condition of these men. He responds to their question in verse 38 which states: “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.”

This verse, taken out of context, has been the basis for the teaching of an entire denomination. Those who teach that baptism

is necessary to complete salvation assume these men were lost and were asking Peter how they could be saved; however, the answer of Peter was more appropriate for people who had been saved already, but were embracing error. Since the word “repent” means “to turn around”, if these men simply changed their behavior and were baptized without exercising faith in Jesus Messiah, they would still be lost. In other words, if they were lost, Peter did not give them complete instructions regarding how they could be saved.

This verse, taken out of context, and viewed only from the point of salvation, would seem to indicate the necessity of baptism for salvation. Clearly, baptism is a work while salvation is a gift of God as Paul stated in Ephesians 2:8-9 which state: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

Many Baptists, for years, have felt uncomfortable with the traditional interpretation of verse thirty-eight believing the subject of the question from these men was concerning salvation. With a profound belief that baptism is absolutely not a necessary of eternal salvation, this verse caused some discomfort for it seems to indicate that water baptism was necessary for these men to receive salvation. Some have gained some degree of comfort by attempting to frame the argument regarding the meaning of this verse on the translation and meaning of the Greek preposition “*ei j*” translated “for” in this verse. The thrust of this argument is based on the translation of this word as “because of” rather than “for” the remission of sins; however, most are uncomfortable with this argument. If, however, these men were already saved but they had embraced erroneous teachings about the Messiah, then the reply of Peter is totally true and unambiguous. To demonstrate that they had truly

repented of their error in rejecting the fact that Jesus was, indeed, the Messiah, they should follow Him in Scriptural baptism. In doing so, their sin of ignorance and error would be forgiven and a right fellowship with God would be restored. In the opinion of the writer, this interpretation is in total harmony with the balance of Scripture.

The last phrase of this verse has been obviously left out of most discussions regarding Acts 2:38. It states: "...and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." This portion of the verse deals with a further benefit of the forgiveness of sins, that is, the gift of the Holy Spirit. If baptism brought, not the indwelling, but the gift of the Holy Spirit as manifested on the Day of Pentecost, then, this verse is obviously directed to saved people who needed to come into New Testament church fellowship. The reasoning is simple; the gift of the Holy Spirit received that day was received, not by every saved person, but only those who had made a commitment to serve the Lord in His church. It is clearly possible for saved people to reject Scriptural baptism and New Testament church membership and still never lose their salvation. In fact, a truly saved person cannot do, or believe, anything that would result in the revocation of eternal life! Suddenly, this verse is not vague and ambiguous at all; baptism is absolutely not necessary to obtain or keep salvation. It is, however, necessary for proper fellowship with the Lord in one of His New Testament churches.

This premise is buttressed by verses 39-42 that state:

"For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call.

And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward genera-

tion.

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls.

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

The subject here is the gift of the Holy Spirit, not the indwelling by the Holy Spirit of the believer that occurs at the moment of salvation. In addition to this indwelling of the believer by the Holy Spirit, Jesus had promised the coming of the Comforter to assist His New Testament churches. God desires all of His children to follow Him in Scriptural baptism and serve Him in one of His churches. He will not, however, coerce His children to make such a commitment; therefore, it may properly be stated that all of His children will be convicted of this need for committed service. The gift is available to ALL His children; however, it is given only to those who respond with commitment to serving Him.

Verse 40 continues to reinforce the reality that these men were already saved because he counseled them to, “Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” The verb can be translated in the passive or middle voice. The context demonstrates that the middle voice translation of “save yourselves” would appear to be more accurate. No individual can save themselves in a spiritual sense because it has been clearly demonstrated that salvation is only obtainable as a free gift by the grace of God. In light of this comment by Peter, these men were caught in a religious web that was destroying their freedom to serve God. If they wanted to enjoy real freedom, they must reject the error and tradition of the religion of the Pharisees.

Notice, that verse 41 does NOT say that those who gladly received his word were SAVED; rather, they were baptized! Baptism is not for the lost, but for the saved. Those who received Peter's word and were willing to make a commitment were baptized and were added to this church. It should be pointed out that the structure of church rolls, church letters, and even proper facilities was not important in this first church. It is highly doubtful the church voted to administer baptism to each of the three thousand individuals. It would have been authorized by common consent based upon the stated commitment of these believers.

It is also very important to note the fact that these three thousand souls were added to that church. Many today teach that the church began on the Day of Pentecost; however, something must exist before something can be added to it! Indeed, Jesus began His church during His personal ministry on earth. This day was not the beginning, but the empowering of the church Jesus built.

Verse 42 is a marvelous confirmation of the commitment of these converts on the Day of Pentecost. "They continued steadfastly..." Every pastor has experienced the sad reality of people, responding to an invitation, stating that they wanted to dedicate, or commit, their life to Jesus; yet, they don't even show up at the next service. The truth of the matter is, they never truly dedicated or committed their lives to Jesus. True dedication and commitment to Jesus Christ will be manifest in a demonstrable way. These folk had truly found something worth living for!

Verses 43-47 demonstrate the normal activities of these believers who had committed their lives to Jesus. These verses state:

"And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need.

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

Having made a commitment to serve the Lord together with the other members of this church, great fear came upon everyone. This concept of fear in the Christian life is often ridiculed as something God does not desire; indeed, a paralyzing fear is not pleasing to God. A solemn and reverent awe of God is necessary to serve Him properly. It is not a light thing for one to commit his life to the Lord and then fail to live up to that commitment. No, living up to the commitment is not necessary for obtaining or keeping salvation, but it is necessary for sweet fellowship with the Lord! It seems this fear, or reverence for God, is conspicuously missing in most churches today because the members place a low and un-consequential value on serving Him.

One of the reasons for such fear and reverence being demonstrated by these church members was the miracles being performed by the Apostles. Clearly, they knew they were in the very presence of the power of God!

Verses 44-46 have been often misunderstood as something prescribed by God, Himself. There is nothing in the text to indicate such commandment from the Lord. Having made a conscious decision to commit their lives to serving the Lord Jesus Christ, the possessions of these church members were not of paramount impor-

tance to them any longer. In fact, they must have reasoned that their commitment and service to Him was more valuable than their stuff! As one ponders this condition, he will surely see that this is a rarely, if not non-existent, level of commitment today. It should be noted that Jesus never commanded a communistic lifestyle for His churches; yet, these men likely believed He was going to be returning to earth soon. As shall be seen later, this action, though not commanded by the Lord, may have contributed to the poverty later experienced by believers in Jerusalem. Having said that, it must be stated, emphatically, that Christians can suffer no real loss in freely giving up possessions for the good of others in the church. Having made a commitment to serve the Lord, one may experience what appears to be need, but it will never be a real need.

Verse 47 is a wonderful account of the result of Christians placing service to the Lord above everything else. They were glad and praised God. This refreshingly peculiar behavior, surely, was manifested to relatives, friends, and other bystanders. How, they must have wondered, could these people divest themselves of their possessions and be happy? Clearly, it was because they had found something of greater value than physical possessions. No doubt, this was the experience of the Apostle as he stated in Philippians 3:4-8 which states:

“Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:

Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;

Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ,”

Paul was not referring to salvation in this passage; rather, his desire to be more like Christ and gain His approval. Again, this is an aspect of Christianity that is hardly ever seen today. Others must judge a group of such happy people as crazy, or else they found something of great value. This joy would be a very powerful attraction to people of all ages and should be present in every church of Jesus Christ. When it was present in this church, the predictable result is then stated, “and the Lord added daily such as should be saved.” Lest one see in these words a Calvinistic meaning of the Lord saving those predestined for salvation, the participial phrase “*touj swzomenouj*” is a present passive participle, which is more accurately translated “the ones being saved (dh).” So, the Lord was adding to the church, on a daily basis, those who had been saved and were willing to commit their lives to Him. There exists no clearer picture of a church of Jesus Christ giving Him pre-eminence in their lives and enjoying the predictable results of such commitment!

So often, the common experience of churches today is one of neither real commitment nor real joy; sadly, that condition is predictable as well. May the Lord grant His children the courage to make such commitment to serving Him. His will is clear; however, the courage to commit to doing His will is frequently lacking.

