

Lesson 4 – The Church Continues to Grow While Preaching the Apostles’ Doctrine

I. The Door Is Opened to Each Ethnic Group

The progression of the gospel is set forth in Acts 1:8, “Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” There are three ethnic groups in the Bible: 1) Jews—the descendants of Abraham and his wife Sarah, 2) Gentiles—anyone who is not a Jew, and 3) Samaritans—Jews who had intermarried with Gentiles. The Holy Ghost first fell in Jerusalem and was kept close by the Jews for a season. Then it spread to Samaria and later to the Gentiles (Romans 1:6; 2:9-10). It was apparently necessary for Peter, who was given the keys to the kingdom (Matthew 16:19), to be present to open the door of the church for each ethnic group when they received full salvation.

A. Samaria Receives the Gospel.

North of Jerusalem lived the Samaritans, a mixed breed of people the Jews especially disliked because they were descendants of Jews who were left behind during the Babylonian captivity and had intermarried with the local heathen Gentiles.

•Acts 8:5-8 “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city.”

Obedience to the Word produced miracles, healings, and deliverance from unclean spirits. This produced great joy but not complete salvation.

•Verse 12 “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”

•Verses 14-17 “Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.”

Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem to pray for the Samaritans because they had not yet received the Holy Ghost. When Peter (the man with the plan) arrived, he and John laid their hands upon them and immediately they received the Holy Ghost!

B. Cornelius, a Devout Gentile, Enters into the Kingdom.

•Acts 10:1-6 “There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and



said, *What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.*"

a) Even though this Italian centurion was devout, feared God with his entire house, gave liberally, and even prayed an angel down from heaven—he needed salvation. If a person is sincere and hungry, God will see that the whole truth is brought to him, even if there is not a church preaching it in his town. The angel told Cornelius to send for Peter, who was approximately thirty-five miles away in Joppa, and *"he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do"* (Acts 10:6).

b) Why could an "angel of God" not inform Cornelius how to be saved? This is the job of a God-called preacher. (See Romans 10:14.) Peter was the man to whom the keys of salvation were originally given. That is why the angel said to send for Peter, *"Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved"* (Acts 11:14).

•Verse 33 *"Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."*

These people had fasted several days while they waited on Peter to arrive. Oh, for someone who is hungry for God! He will not argue or debate Scripture but is ready to receive and obey what a God-sent preacher tells him.

•Verses 34-43 Peter preached Christ to these eager listeners.

•Verse 44 *"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word."*

The Holy Ghost was poured out on them just like on the Day of Pentecost as they waited on God. This divine interruption to their church service was a direct result of their hunger and thirst after God! God is ready when you are!

•Verses 45-46 *"And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God."*

a) Certain Jews who came with Peter were very prejudiced against people who were not of their race or religion. They did not believe that God would give the Holy Ghost to "heathen" Gentiles. To them, the convincing and indisputable proof was the fact that they *"heard them speak with tongues."*

b) There are those who feel they have received the Holy Ghost without speaking in tongues. This is not possible. In almost every incident where someone received the Holy Ghost, it is recorded that they spoke in tongues. Instead of arguing against something we do not have or know about, why not just do it? It is better to do it and not need to, than to not do it and be lost.

c) Some people consider tongues to be a supplementary gift that helps a Christian when praying. The term, *prayer language*, is not biblical terminology. The purpose of speaking in tongues is that it is the initial sign that one has received the Holy Ghost. *"Wherefore tongues are for a sign [Greek definition: token, evidence] not to them that believe, but to them that believe not"* (1 Corinthians 14:22). After one has received the Holy Ghost, he does have an added dimension in prayer. *"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh*



intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26-27). In this application of Scripture we should not mix the cause of tongues for the effect it has upon one when praying.

•*Verses 46-48 “Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.”*

- a) Even though they had received the Holy Ghost, they still lacked one step in the plan of salvation: baptism in Jesus’ name. Notice that Peter commanded Cornelius to be baptized. In the original Greek, the word *command* means “to give an order.” As a soldier, Cornelius knew that a command had to be obeyed! Peter made these believers conform to the original plan of salvation given in Acts 2:38.
- b) It is possible to receive the Holy Ghost before one is baptized. If this is the case, you should immediately be baptized in Jesus’ name to complete your salvation.

Question: What about those who have never heard this truth? How will they be judged?

First of all, Matthew 7:1 says, *“Judge not, that ye be not judged.”* We may not know the condition of a person’s heart at the moment of death. Only God is qualified to judge an individual’s eternal destiny. Abraham stated concerning the judgment of Sodom and Gommorah in Genesis 18:25, *“That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”* We should commit the souls of people to a righteous God who will judge with mercy and compassion. He will do what is right for each individual.

Secondly, we do know that people will be judged by their obedience to the Word of God. Jesus said in John 3:3-5 that unless a person is born again of the water and the Spirit, he cannot see nor enter into the kingdom of God. If a person expects to be saved he must obey the plan of salvation in Acts 2:38. God is not willing that any should perish and has provided a means of escape. People judge themselves according to whether or not they believe, obey, and do it.

Finally, if people hunger and thirst after righteousness, the Bible promises that they shall be filled (Matthew 5:6). As in the case of Cornelius, God will see that truth finds them and they are given an opportunity to be saved. The rich man in hell tried to strike a bargain to keep his unsaved brothers from joining him. He pleaded that if God would do something extraordinary, like sending someone from the grave to his lost kinfolk, then they would be saved. Abraham replied to the rich man that they had a Bible and God-anointed preachers to show them the way. In other words, if they were not motivated enough to study their Bible and seek out the truth, then they would not be saved even if God did something miraculous. (See Luke 16:27-31.) How many people have actually taken the time to hunt through the maze of religions until they found the truth? Did not Jesus say, *“Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:14)?* Most go to a church because of convenience, programs, kinsfolk, or business advantage. If people will seek God with all their heart, He will be found of them (I Chronicles 28:9; Jeremiah 29:11-14). God will make truth available, but it is up to us to take the initiative. People go to heaven not by default but by seeking, finding, and obeying the true plan of salvation.

II. Believers of Other Religions Conform to the Apostles' Doctrine

A. The Ethiopian Eunuch, a Jewish Proselyte, Discovers More Truth.

•Acts 8:26-31 “And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.”



Returning from church with Bible in hand, this devoutly religious man read something they did not teach in his church. He needed someone to lead and guide him into all truth.

With humility and a teachable spirit, he asked Philip to instruct him.

•Verses 35-39 “Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.”

- a) Although it is not recorded what Philip preached, it had to be the same apostles' doctrine he shared with the Samaritans. How do we know? The actions of the eunuch confirmed it. He believed, was baptized, and went home rejoicing!
- b) The Bible points out that they were traveling in a desert. Was it a coincidence that there just happened to be a place with enough water for complete immersion when the eunuch desired to be baptized?
- c) Did the eunuch receive the Holy Ghost? The Scripture declares, “he went on his way rejoicing”. “The Codex A [an ancient manuscript] says that the eunuch received the Holy Ghost, or rather that it *fell* upon him.”¹⁴ Real salvation involves rejoicing! It is more than a good feeling; there is an exuberant, overwhelming excitement that comes from receiving the Holy Ghost! When Jesus “*rejoiced in spirit*” (Luke 10:21), the actual Greek meaning of the word *rejoice* is “to jump for joy.” Some jump, others clap, some shake, and a few cry, but all speak in tongues uncontrollably with overwhelming emotion when the Holy Ghost comes to indwell!

B. Followers of John the Baptist Accept More Truth.

•Acts 19:1-4 “And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized

¹⁴Treece, M. D., *The Literal Word Acts I*, (Shippensburg, PA: Treasure House, 1993), 305.

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."

The founding of the church at Ephesus began with Paul meeting twelve believers of John the Baptist "faith." He accepted them as believers where they were in their religious experience. He then probed to find if they had completed their salvation journey by obeying Acts 2:38. As a believer, we should ask ourselves the same questions.

- 1) Did I receive the Holy Ghost after I became a believer?
- 2) Have I been baptized the correct way, in Jesus' name?

•Verses 5-7 *"When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve."*

- a) Notice the open-minded and ready-to-obey attitude they had. They could have argued, "I was baptized the same way Jesus was. Why should I be rebaptized?" Instead, *"when they heard this,"* they were baptized again and this time in the name of Jesus. Afterward, they prayed until they received the Holy Ghost.
- b) What we need today is less defending denominational creeds and more obeying the apostles' doctrine. A "when they heard this" attitude quickly obeys truth as it is revealed. Even these who were years removed from the Day of Pentecost had to conform to *"the faith which was once delivered unto the saints"* (Jude 1:3). Paul was still preaching the Acts 2:38 plan of salvation just like Peter originally gave it! Is your preacher still preaching the same plan of salvation today?

- c) Some teach that a person receives the Holy Ghost when a church elder lays his hands on them and conveys the gift without them having to speak in tongues. They imply that the "laying on of hands" is the method and proof of receiving the Spirit. This doctrine is false. No human being has the power to give someone else the Holy Ghost.



God alone has this ability and makes the choice of whom He will indwell (John 5:21). God promised to pour out His Spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2:28). When the Holy Ghost was first given on the Day of Pentecost, no one laid his hand upon the seekers—it fell freely upon all who were waiting for the promise (Acts 2:4). When a Spirit-filled person is praying with someone seeking the Holy Ghost, he may lay his hand upon his/her forehead as aid of faith. The Bible speaks of the spiritual synergy created when two or three agree in unity (Deuteronomy 32:30; Matthew 18:19-20). It is like jump-starting a car—it increases the power! The sign of having received the Holy Ghost is not the laying on of hands, someone blowing/breathing over you, or any other man-induced phenomenon. The infallible proof according to Scripture is speaking in an unknown tongue as the Spirit gives the utterance (Acts 2:4).

Review Questions for Lesson 4

1. Name the three ethnic groups represented in Acts 1:8.

Answer: Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles.

2. After the Samaritans had obeyed the gospel, why did Peter need to come and pray for them?

Answer: Even though they had repented and been baptized in Jesus' name, none of them had received the Holy Ghost. Peter needed to be present to open the door of salvation so they too could receive the Holy Ghost.

3. Answer these six questions from the story of Cornelius, the first Gentile to be saved.

- a) What five Christian qualifications did Cornelius possess before his conversion?

Answer: He was devout, feared God with his entire house, gave liberally, had a consistent, powerful prayer life, and fasted.

b) Why could the angel not tell him how to be saved?

Answer: God ordained that to be the job of a preacher.

c) What happened while Peter was preaching?

Answer: They interrupted his message by receiving the Holy Ghost.

d) How did the skeptical Jews know the Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost?

Answer: When they heard them speak in tongues, it was the undeniable proof to them that the Gentiles were also the recipients of salvation.

e) Can one receive the Holy Ghost before being baptized?

Answer: Yes. Cornelius and his family did.

f) If a person has the Holy Ghost, is it still necessary to be baptized in Jesus' name?

Answer: Yes. Notice that after Cornelius received the Holy Ghost, Peter especially emphasized this by commanding him to be baptized.

4. How will God judge people who have not heard the Acts 2:38 plan of salvation?

Answer: First, it is not our job to judge but God's. Secondly, we should have confidence that God will judge righteously. Thirdly, people judge themselves by their desire (or lack of desire) for God who will place truth in their path and then it is up to them to obey or disobey.

5. If a person is a member of another faith, does he/she need to change churches?

Answer: All religious beliefs have some truth. But like the Ethiopian eunuch, when more truth is revealed we need to walk in that light. (See II John 1:10.)

6. Paul asked the followers of John the Baptist two questions that need to be asked of every Christian believer. What were they?

Answer: 1. Have you received the Holy Ghost since you became a believer? 2. How were you baptized? Paul asked these questions to see if they had conformed to the Acts 2:38 plan of salvation.

7. What was the attitude of those believers to new truth?

Answer: The Bible says, "*when they heard this,*" they received the newly revealed truth and were ready to obey.

8. Is it necessary to be rebaptized in Jesus' name if one has been baptized differently like the Ephesian believers?

Answer: Yes. We must conform to the exact way the apostles did it in the Book of Acts.

9. Why did Paul lay his hands upon the believers when they received the Holy Ghost?

Answer: This was an aid to their faith just as we are commanded to "*lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover*" (Mark 16:18). Not all who received the Holy Ghost had hands laid on them but all spoke in tongues, making that the sign of having received this experience.

Conclusion

"*Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses*" (Hebrews 12:1), let's join those in the New Testament church who have experienced the new birth. Only when you obey Acts 2:38 will you feel completeness and fulfillment in your search for salvation.

1. **Acts 17:11 – Berean Believers.** "*These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*"

Sincere believers who receive this word are those who have opened their mind, heart and Bible while searching out the truth contained in this study.



2. **Acts 9:17; 22:16 – Paul’s Conversion.** *“And Ananias . . . putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord . . . hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.” “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”*

Even though Ananias was not an apostle, he as a believer possessed miraculous power to heal and helped Paul receive the Holy Ghost. (See Mark 16:17-20.)

3. **Acts 18:25-26 – Apollos.** *“This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.”*

No matter how involved or learned we may be in Christianity, are we willing to be taught the way of God more perfectly? If there is more truth available, are we humble and sincere enough to receive and obey it? Let us be like Apollos and receive all that Christ died to give us! We cannot afford to allow our personal pride to stand in the way of complete salvation.

4. **I Peter 1:8-10 – Obedient Christians.** *“Ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you.”*

The happiest people on earth are the ones who have fully obeyed Acts 2:38. They have repented, been baptized in Jesus’ name, and are filled with the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in other tongues! We are fortunate. Moses and Elijah would have loved to exchange places with us. This experience was not available in their day. Let’s rejoice together in our own personal New Testament Day of Pentecost!

Thank you for opening your heart and taking the time to study God’s Word and learn more truth. We trust that this has been an inspiration to you. May the blessings of our Lord Jesus be upon you. Amen!



There's room for you!

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