Gift of the Holy Ghost

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What Is the Gift of the Holy Ghost in Acts 2:38?

One claims the gift of the Holy Ghost at baptism is the Holy Spirit giving the gift of local church membership. This wild interpretation contradicts what the New Testament teaches about God's promised gift of the Holy Spirit as His personal presence to believers. It corrupts the giver and the gift, contradicts many prophecies, degrades or neglects the actual gift, misses God's gift to Christ, and embraces a foolish and novel interpretation.

A. Here are a collection of statements made by one for the baptismal membership theory:
   1. "The whole issue really hangs on Acts 2.37-47."
   2. "The critical thing to understand in Acts 2.37-47 is the gift of the Holy Ghost promised upon baptism."
   3. "In summation, the whole thing hangs on Acts 2.37-47 especially with regard to the gift of the Holy Ghost promised in vs. 38-39."
   4. "As we follow the narrative, we look for what happened to those who were baptized in order to ascertain this gift of the Holy Ghost. Verses 41 & 47 show us: they were added by the Lord to the church…. This gift of the Holy Ghost is being added by Him to the body WITHIN which He ministers."
   5. The last sentence should be rephrased and repeated to grasp their wild interpretation – The gift of the Holy Ghost in Acts 2:37-47 is the Holy Spirit giving a person church membership in a local church.

B. Such an argument requires a subjective-genitive use of "the gift of the Holy Ghost."
   1. This point is extremely significant and bears important hermeneutical consequences to any serious Bible reader that understands the difference.
   2. A subjective-genitive use means that some gift is given by the Holy Ghost, Who is acting as the subject of the giving; that is, the Holy Ghost becomes the giver of a gift not defined in the verse. The Holy Ghost is no longer the gift, but He becomes the giver of a gift.
   3. An objective-genitive use means the Holy Ghost is the specified gift; that is, the Holy Ghost is the object of the giving. The Holy Ghost is understood in this sense to be the gift given by God to those that are baptized.
   4. Once the subjective-genitive sense is forced on the text, then church membership is assumed to be the referenced gift given by the Holy Ghost upon baptism. Read the quotations again that are given above to confirm this line of reasoning.
   5. The wild theory is as follows: Repent and be baptized, and ye shall receive the gift of church membership from the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is not the gift; church membership is the gift; the giver of church membership is the Holy Ghost.
   6. Scriptural examples of genitive prepositional phrases requiring a subjective-genitive sense

determined by context are Daniel 11:37; Haggai 2:7; Galatians 2:16; James 2:4; and I John 3:16. In each case the object of the preposition is the subject of the genitive phrase, meaning that it is the person or thing that is acting.

7. Scriptural examples of genitive prepositional phrases requiring an objective-genitive sense determined by context are Luke 11:42; I Timothy 3:6; I Tim 6:10; James 2:1; and Jude 21. In each case the object of the preposition is the object also of the genitive phrase, meaning that it is the person or thing that is acted upon.
8. As with most constructions, the constraints of the context determine the grammar.

C. Bible doctrine by comparing scripture requires the objective-genitive sense of this phrase; that is, God gave the Holy Ghost as the gift to those who are baptized.
   1. The O.T. prophets prophesied that God would give His Spirit, but they did not prophesy that the Spirit would give membership in a New Testament local church.
   2. Two principal prophecies among others are obvious references to God pouring out the Holy Ghost at Pentecost (Joel 2:28-29; Zechariah 12:10).
   3. The promise is objective-genitive, that is, God would give the Spirit as the gift.
   4. The great prophet of the reformation, John the Baptist, also prophesied that God would give His Spirit through Christ (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33).
   5. Observe how John describes the giving of the Spirit as a baptism. The Spirit no more does the baptizing in what John spoke of than the Spirit does the giving in what Peter spoke of. John requires an objective-genitive sense in Acts 2:38.

D. Jesus before His crucifixion clearly promised His Father's gift of the Holy Spirit to believers (Luke 24:49; John 7:37-39; 14:16-17,26-27; 15:26-27; 16:7; Acts 1:4-5,8).
   1. The Holy Spirit was to be given as a gift only to believers that believed on Christ.
   2. The promise of the Spirit to believers was made universal by, "If any man thirst."
   3. The offer of the Holy Spirit to believers was made conditional by the same words.
   4. The Holy Spirit was to be given after Jesus Christ was glorified in heaven.
   5. The Holy Ghost Himself was to be given: it was not the Holy Ghost giving.
   6. God the Father was committed to give another Comforter, even the Holy Spirit.
   7. The Holy Spirit thus given was to have an internal relationship in believers.
   8. The Holy Ghost was to be sent by the Father in the name of Jesus Christ.
   9. The Holy Ghost as the Messenger of Peace was given by Jesus to believers.
   10. Jesus Christ promised to give the Spirit, which came from the Father, to believers.
   11. The Holy Ghost could not be given to believing saints until Jesus Christ departed.
   12. The Holy Ghost was specifically identified as the promise and the gift from God.

E. Peter's exhortation in Acts 2:38 is the perfect fulfillment of these clear Bible promises.
   1. The disciples waited for the promise of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5,8).
   2. Peter credited their gift of tongues to the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 2:16-18).

3. Peter concluded his sermon by identifying Christ's glorification, His authority to dispense the Holy Ghost, the promise of the Holy Ghost, and the actual giving of the Spirit to the believers (Acts 2:33).
4. God's gift of the Holy Ghost in Acts 2:38 fulfills both Joel 2:28 and John 7:39.
5. Peter added that the promise (of the Holy Spirit as the gift) was to all (Acts 2:39).
6. Peter quickly taught that God had given the Holy Spirit to the obedient (Acts 5:32).
7. To confirm apostolic authority, they gave the Spirit at Samaria (Acts 8:14-19).
8. The churches of Judea thereafter had the promised Spirit or Comforter (Acts 9:31).

F. To approve new Gentile conversions, God gave Cornelius the Spirit (Acts 10:43-48).
   1. Peter recognized the giving of the Spirit to the believing Gentiles (Acts 11:15-18).
   2. Peter plainly described at an important church council that Cornelius had received the Holy Ghost as the gift promised to believers (Acts 15:7-9).
   3. Do not miss the repetition of the promise, the timing after exaltation, the necessity of faith and obedience, and the Holy Spirit Himself as the gift given to believers.

G. Paul knew this gift from God to be the Holy Spirit as the Comforter for believers.
   1. He expected believers at Ephesus to have received the Holy Spirit as God's gift (Acts 19:1-6); note that he asked nothing about their church membership.
   2. Paul specifically taught that the Holy Spirit was given to believers (Eph 1:13-14).
   3. He repeated God's gift of an earnest and seal (II Cor 1:21-22; 5:5; Eph 4:30).
   4. He stated God's gift of the Spirit to have been conditioned on faith (Gal 3:2-5).
   5. He taught that Jesus had to die for the promised Holy Spirit to be given (Gal 3:14).
   6. Paul understood the Holy Spirit to be the believers' Comforter (Rom 5:5; 8:14-17).
   7. He also knew that the early believers had the firstfruits of the Spirit (Romans 8:23).

H. The gift of the Holy Ghost promised at baptism must be objective-genitive: it is God's giving of the Holy Ghost through Jesus Christ to the obedient followers of Christ.
   1. The gift of the Holy Ghost in Acts 2:38 is God's giving of the promised Comforter.
   2. At water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, the answer and obedience and proof of faith (John 7:39; Acts 5:32; 8:37; 15:7-9; I Peter 3:21), God gives the Holy Spirit to His obedient saints in fulfillment of His promise of His personal presence.
   3. The earnest and seal of a believer is the Spirit Himself, not church membership.
   4. Supernatural gifts accompanied and manifested the Spirit's presence generally (I Cor 12:4-11), on the apostles particularly (Mark 16:19-20; Acts 1:8), and in unusual situations requiring special confirmation (Acts 2:1-21; 8:14-19; 10:44-48).
   5. Speaking in tongues and other miraculous signs and wonders were not the gift but rather manifestations of the gift (Acts 1:8; I Corinthians 12:4; Hebrews 2:4).
   6. Samaria received the Holy Ghost well after baptism to confirm the apostles (Acts 8:14-19); Cornelius before baptism to confirm Gentile conversions (Acts 10:43-48; 11:15-17; 15:7-9); and the disciples of John after hearing of Christ (Acts 19:1-6).

I. God's gift of the Spirit is no more limited to local churches than the prayer of Luke 11:13 is limited to local churches. God gives His Holy Spirit to individual believers.
   1. Individual church members may be filled with the Holy Spirit and walk in the Spirit with full spiritual blessings, while the church overall is grieving the Spirit.
   2. On the other hand, God's Spirit blesses churches even with some members in the flesh (a constant fact). Relations with the Spirit are not dependent on the church.
   3. Sinful members or sinful churches cannot take away God's gift (Rev 2:24; 3:1-4).
   4. Those who limit the Spirit's presence to local church members must hold that obeying the Spirit to withdraw from a sinning church results in losing the Spirit.

J. Cornelius gave us an excellent example of the gift of the Holy Spirit at baptism.
   1. The gift preceded baptism, not because it was a different operation of the Spirit, but because the apostles needed special confirmation of Gentile conversions.
   2. The Holy Ghost fell on Cornelius and the other Gentile converts (Acts 10:44).
   3. It was not the Holy Ghost pouring church membership on Cornelius, but God pouring the Holy Ghost on them. Again, Acts 2:38 must be objective-genitive.
   4. Observe that the Holy Spirit was poured on those that heard the word (Eph 1:13).
   5. The Holy Ghost was poured out upon Cornelius and his company (Acts 10:45).
   6. The Holy Ghost Himself was poured out; He did not pour church membership.
   7. The Holy Ghost was poured on the assembled Gentiles, rather than the Gentiles being poured into some church they knew nothing about nor had agreed to join.
   8. This pouring out of the Holy Spirit was the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38).
   9. This pouring out was the same the apostles received by virtue of Peter's "also."
   10. This gift of the Holy Ghost occurred after a short message regarding the Person of Jesus Christ. There is no record of church doctrine or identity being taught.
   11. The giving of the gift to Cornelius was manifested by new tongues (Acts 10:46).
   12. Peter ordered Cornelius to be baptized for he had received baptism's gift (10:47).
   13. Cornelius received the Holy Ghost; he did not receive church membership.
   14. The gift Cornelius received was the same gift the apostles had received earlier.
   15. But notice particularly the automatic connection with baptism. The presence of the Holy Spirit and baptism go hand in hand, just as Peter had taught earlier (Acts 2:38). Church membership is totally out of the picture. Let God be true.
   16. The Holy Ghost, not church membership, fell upon Cornelius and his company (Acts 11:15). This construction requires Acts 2:38 to be objective-genitive.
   17. It was the same event, a new order, that took place with the apostles on Pentecost.
   18. It occurred as Peter began to preach the gospel of Christ, which was well before he worried about teaching them church doctrine, practice, membership, or worship.
   19. The experience of Cornelius was the fulfillment of Christ's ministry (Acts 11:16).

20. He was baptized with the Holy Ghost, not by the Holy Ghost, as in I Cor 12:13.
21. John's prophecy and Jesus Christ's promise were fulfilled in this gift of the Spirit.
22. Cornelius received the same gift as the Jews after believing upon Christ (11:17).
23. God gave the gift of the Holy Spirit; the Spirit did not give church membership.
24. It was the gift of the Holy Spirit that was associated with believing (John 7:39).
25. It requires an objective-genitive sense on Acts 2:38 as does the rest of Scripture.
26. God gave the gift of the Holy Ghost to Cornelius to prove his faith (Act 15:7-8).
27. It was the same gift given the same way as what had occurred earlier to the Jews.
28. It was God giving the Holy Ghost. Get this! The Spirit did not give anything. Scripture knows of no gift from the Spirit upon faith or baptism.

K. The Holy Spirit's presence (as a witness) is a seal of authenticity or ratification that a believer is God's child and possession (II Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30).

L. Jesus received the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit at His baptism (John 1:32-34; 4:34). How differently should we be treated? As the sons of God, are we subject to the whims of a congregation affecting our relationship with God by the Spirit of God?

M. The eunuch went on his way rejoicing in the Holy Ghost (Romans 5:5; 14:17; 15:13; Galatians 5:22), though he was not a member of any church (Acts 8:39).

N. The Philippian jailor rejoiced with the very same gift of the Holy Ghost, and this enemy of the church did not become a member of the church that night (Acts 16:34).

O. Be it known that water baptism as the door of the church is Roman Catholic heresy.
    1. PB preachers, collectively a rather ignorant group of ministers, follow Rome here.
    2. The one that argues for the gift of the Holy Ghost in Acts 2:38 to be the Spirit giving church membership has strained at a gnat to support his RCC camel heresy.

P. It may be no one else in the history of the world has had this ridiculous application.

Q. Each church has 10-25% of its members that are reprobates – how do they participate in the Holy Ghost?

R. How in the world can someone leave a disobedient church by obeying the Spirit and lose the Spirit for not being part of a disobedient church?

S. Most of the exhortations regarding the Holy Spirit are realized individually, not corporately.

T. What is the candlestick? When He is removed, what happens to the faithful members?

U. These "church idolaters" also hold nonresident members, which makes their church body a farce by any measure, totally corrupting the Spirit's frequent metaphor.

V. These "church idolaters" have no body life that resembles the church of Acts 2.

W. The physical body (I Cor 6:19-20) and the church (I Cor 3:16) are temples of the Holy Ghost, and it was He Himself that was given to both in the objective sense above.

X. Those rebaptized in Acts 19 were filled with the Holy Ghost without membership.