

GOD'S NEW YEARS GIFT

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AC 18:24 Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

AC 19:1 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples² and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

AC 19:3 So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

AC 19:4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus."⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.⁶ When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.⁷ There were about twelve men in all.

All of us here, by now, have opened our Christmas presents. From the children with their toys to the young people with their ipods, cell phones, and computers, to the adults with their big screen TV sets and their jewelry, we have now opened and now know what our presents are. But we as Christians, I assume, know what Christmas is all about. Christmas is giving to others because God gave His Son to us as our Christmas gift. But have you heard about God's New Year's Gift? Well, God's gift is actually a New Life's gift for every day of every New Year. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

As we look at our text the first thing we see is that **PEOPLE CAN KNOW ABOUT THE FIRST GIFT AND NOT HAVE THE SECOND GIFT**, the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, if they do not have the second gift, they do not really have the first gift either. Look, for example, at Apollos. He was a preacher--and although he had a knowledge of Jesus, and although he was very sincere, and although he was extremely eloquent and learned, he still needed the second gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

There are many preachers who have not received that Second Gift. They know about Jesus. They have studied the life of Jesus. They have Jesus as their hero, their model. Yet they do not really know Jesus because they have not been born again by the Holy Spirit. They can preach sermons, give lectures, write books, and speak eloquently

about Jesus, and yet not really know Him.

Jesus spoke to a rich young ruler one day. The man ran to Jesus because he wanted the one thing he did not have, eternal life. He had heard about Jesus. To some degree he believed that Jesus had the answer to eternal life, that which he was seeking. But despite that knowledge of Jesus, he went away sorrowful because he put his material security above his immortal soul. Jesus was also sorrowful, sorrowful that one could be so close to truth and yet so far away.

But even closer was Judas Iscariot. He was the financial advisor for the group, the treasurer, the one who kept the money the disciples gave to meet the needs of the Rabbi and His followers. Judas heard the teachings of Jesus firsthand. He saw Jesus in action. He saw the miracles, heard the prayers, saw the popularity of the Messiah. Alas, he saw Jesus as a political Messiah who would give him an important appointment when he became the new ruler of Israel. However, when he saw the persecutions and the coming doom of Jesus and his disciples, Judas also put self survival above his soul's survival, just as the rich young ruler had done. He knew Jesus well, but was as lost as Herod and Pilate, and even more lost because he had a better knowledge of Jesus.

Nicodemus was another prominent Jew who knew about Jesus, wondered what it was that gave Him such power, and decided to come to Jesus one night to have his many questions answered. Before he had a chance to ask Jesus the questions, Jesus gave him the answer-- "Ye must be born again!" He also told Nicodemus, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." And although Nicodemus later became a devout believer, we do not find out about his faith until the crucifixion.

The Zondervan Reference Bible speaks to this knowing about Jesus instead of knowing Jesus. It says, ²⁻³ The question Paul put to the twelve, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed," suggests two things: (1) that he assumed they were truly Christians, since they professed to believe; and (2) that he held that true belief and the reception of the Holy Spirit always went together, being unable to be separated either logically or chronologically. These two assumptions caused Paul some difficulty when he met these twelve men, for something in their life indicated that one or the other assumption was wrong. When they answered his question by saying, "We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit," he knew the second assumption was not in error. So he asked further about the first one and found that they claimed to have been baptized only with "John's baptism."

Now to some degree I was like Apollos or these 12 men spoken about here. I was like Nicodemus and the others. I knew about Jesus. My parents told me about him. The Old Regular Baptist Church at Stone Cole told me about him. The Church of Christ at Bosco told me about Him. My friends who were Christians told me about Him. So, my assumption was, I know ABOUT HIM so I must be O.K. But I was troubled because I knew that something was missing in my life; I knew that all was not right; I knew that the vacuum that I felt within was not filled with God; I knew that I needed a 'new birth' even if I couldn't call it that. If Paul had asked me the question, "Have you received the Holy

Spirit since you believed”, I would have had to say, “I have not even heard about there being any Holy Spirit.” Why? Because I could not lie down at night with the question resolved ‘What will happen to my soul if I die before awaking?’ I did not have that sense of joy that I saw in true believers. I did not have the Spirit of Jesus living within me.

The second major point in these Scriptures is this--WE ALL NEED SOMEONE TO TELL US ABOUT THIS NEW YEAR’S (NEW LIFE’S) GIFT. Apollos had not received this GIFT, neither had the 12 men in Ephesus.

Notice, first, how Apollos received this GIFT--^{AC 18:24} Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

Priscilla and Aquila were Paul’s partners in the ministry and in tent-making. Remember how Paul met them?^{Acts 18: 2} There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them,³ and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.⁴ Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Doubtless Paul had spoken to them about a ‘completed’ Jew, one who knew the True Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. “How shall they hear without a preacher”...and Paul was their preacher. But now Priscilla and Aquila have the opportunity to mentor one of the greatest preachers in the New Testament, Apollos. He preached Jesus, but Apollos only knew the baptism of John the Baptist. The *Bible* tells us much about Apollos: He was an Alexandrian Jew; he was a learned man; he had a great knowledge of the Scriptures; he had been instructed in the way of the Lord; he spoke with great fervor; he taught about Jesus accurately; he spoke boldly in the synagogue.

If anyone would seem to be a Christian it was Apollos. But we find here that HE TAUGHT ABOUT JESUS ACCURATELY. He taught about Jesus. He knew about Jesus. But he was not complete. It took Priscilla and Aquila to disciple him. They invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately and more perfectly. He was no longer John’s disciple; now Apollos was a disciple of Jesus, a mighty evangelist, a man who received the New Year’s, New Life, Gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now notice how the 12 of Ephesus received that gift. Someone had to tell them that good news. That someone was Paul:^{AC 19:1} While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples² and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

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Apollos had gone to Corinth and Paul came to Ephesus. These two evangelists needed to be in different places, and so they were. At Ephesus Paul met some others who knew about Jesus but did not know Jesus. So he asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed.” As the *Zondervan Reference* noted, Paul saw their need for the rebirth. They were good men, religious men, zealous men, but they had not received the New Year’s Gift of the Holy Spirit.

The obvious implication of Paul’s question is this: “If you truly believed in Jesus you would have the Holy Spirit in your hearts and you would not have that emptiness that I sense in you.” Paul was really teaching these Jerusalem Jews who had been followers of John the Baptist that they needed to know Jesus and not just have the second-hand testimony of even so great a man as John the Baptist. Paul explained to them that the baptism of John the Baptist was a ‘baptism of repentance’, and that they needed more than repentance, they needed faith in Jesus, a faith that was also a commitment to be baptized in His Name and to live for Him and to follow Jesus and not John. In fact Paul later told his converts not even to follow him unless he was following Jesus Christ.

Certainly these 12, like the believers at Pentecost, were Jewish and were experiencing their Pentecost of signs and wonders with baptism in Jesus’ Name and with the laying on of Paul’s hands. There were tongues and prophecies, but the same is not mentioned about Apollos. The Gift of the Spirit came with Power, just as Jesus had promised in Acts 1.

The important point for us is this: The moment we believe and commit ourselves to Jesus, God gives us the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Hence, ^{1 Cor.12: 13} For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

A true teacher teaches that every true believer has been baptized by the Holy Spirit. Every true Christian has the great Gift of the Holy Spirit

DO YOU, THEN, HAVE YOUR NEW YEARS GIFT? Notice, I did not ask if you knew ABOUT this GIFT. I asked if you had this GIFT. Upon your reception of this gift does your eternal future depend. Listen to Jesus: ^{JN 3:1} Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

JN 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

JN 3:4 “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!”

JN 3:5 Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, “You must be born again.” ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

JN 3:9 “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

JN 3:10 “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven--the Son of Man. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”

JN 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.