

Cornelius, Holy Spirit Baptism, & Salvation

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As we open Acts 10 we read of Cornelius who was described as, “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 always” (vs. 1, 2). While continuing to read we learn of the events surrounding Cornelius’ salvation.

In our first observation, we must note the uniqueness surrounding Cornelius and his conversion. This man was a Gentile, and yet Peter still went in unto him and provided that which was needed for his salvation. Even though there were other Gentiles who had tasted of salvation (See Acts 8 and the Ethiopian), Cornelius still stands in a unique position because, the Ethiopian had ties to the Jewish religion while Cornelius had no such Jewish ties. The Ethiopian “had come to Jerusalem for to worship” (Acts 8:27), and he was reading from the Jewish prophet, Isaiah (Acts 8:30). So Cornelius stands apart from the Ethiopian in this fact.

On the other hand, we remember that the Philippian jailor was also a Gentile, and he tasted of salvation without any Jewish ties. Yet, Cornelius still was unique in that he was the first Gentile convert who had no Jewish ties and he and his were the only Gentiles to be baptized with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Now, there are those who would deny this fact. In fact, in their desire to remove water baptism from God’s plan of salvation, there are those who would proclaim that salvation comes by Holy Spirit Baptism. As we continue our study, we will focus our attention on this claim. Is the fact that Cornelius received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit a proof that he and his family were saved before they were baptized in water.

Let us begin by comparing the salvation of the three that have been mentioned earlier. Even though there are some unique facts surrounding Cornelius’ salvation, there are also some similarities. First, all three, the Ethiopian, Cornelius and the jailor, had to hear words so that faith could be produced and salvation had (Rom. 10:17). Concerning the Ethiopian, Luke records, “Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, (Isaiah 53 was the passage noted, DWW) and preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:35). Of the jailor we read, “And they spake unto him the word of the Lord” (Acts 16:32). This is significant, because words must be spoken for men to be saved. We are “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23). James wrote, “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (Jas. 1:18-21). It is impossible for anyone to be saved without the word of God being heard or considered. Luke by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was very specific to record for us this fact in the case of Cornelius. Notice the various references made to this fact in Acts chapters 10 and 11. Cornelius was told that Peter “shall **tell thee** what thou oughtest to do” (Acts 10:6). Peter was told that Cornelius had been “warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and **to hear words of thee**” (Acts 10:22). Again in verses 32 and 33 of chapter 10 Cornelius rehearsed to Peter what he had been told by God and how he had responded. Cornelius said:

Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, **shall speak unto thee**. 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**.

In Chapter 11:14 Peter sums up well why it was that there was a necessity to speak words so that Cornelius and his house could be save. Concerning what Peter would do it reads, “Who (Peter) shall **tell thee words**, whereby thou and all thy house **shall be saved**.” Note how salvation was directly linked to words that would be spoken. All of this is quite significant when asking which baptism saved Cornelius. In verse 15 Peter tells us, “And as I **began to speak**, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.” The Greek word translated “began” is *archomai*. The word means to first begin, to commence, in order of time. Peter’s point is before I was able to tell them words whereby they might be saved, the Holy Spirit fell on them as it did us in the beginning. Is it reasonable to conclude that words were not necessary for their salvation? The answer to the question is “absolutely not.” Yet, this is the exact conclusion that we must draw if we believe that the Holy Spirit Baptism indicated that these Gentiles were saved. The Holy Spirit took several opportunities to let us know that the speaking of words was **totally necessary** for the house of Cornelius to be saved. No, the conclusion is that Holy Spirit Baptism **did not save** Cornelius and his house!

Another similarity concerning the salvation of these three individuals was all three were commanded to be baptized. This fact is recorded in Acts 8, the Ethiopian, Acts 16, the jailor, and in Acts 10 with Cornelius. In fact, notice Acts 10:47, 48. “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.**” Why did Peter do that? Because “The like figure whereunto even **baptism doth also now save us**” (1 Pet. 3:21). That goes right along with the language of Jesus when He forever linked belief and baptism to salvation. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16).

Finally, we must address this question. If Holy Spirit Baptism was not for the purpose of salvation then what was its purpose? A few passages from Acts 10 and 11 will help us understand the purpose. Let’s notice some of those at this time.

- What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common (10:15).
- Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean (10:28).
- Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him (10:34, 35).
- 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 (10:45).
- Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life (11:17, 18).

A careful look at these passages in the context of Cornelius’ conversion shows us that the reason Cornelius and his household received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit was to put Heaven’s stamp of approval upon the Gentiles being admitted into the kingdom of God when they obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ. There was no need for them to be channeled through Judaism before they were baptized into Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:27). Holy Spirit Baptism in this instance was to persuade the Jews, Peter included, that he should not forbid the saving water baptism simply because Cornelius, or any other Gentile for that matter, had not obeyed the Old Law nor had been circumcised. Looking at the context, we understand that it did just that.

The fact is that no one has ever been commanded to be baptized of the Holy Spirit. It was not a command, but rather it was a promise made by Jesus and fulfilled only by Jesus in two recorded instances in the New Testament: Once on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and once on the Gentile household of Cornelius (Acts 10). There are many examples where men were commanded to be baptized in water for the remission of sins so they could be added to the one church of the New Testament.

In closing, may we ever be diligent in our study and sincere in our approach to Scripture. May we never enter into our study with preconceived ideas which will cloud our reason and obstruct our knowledge of Truth? Until next time, let us each study our Bibles more and more.