

The Gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38

Introduction

- I. It was more than 30 years ago, Monday, May 9, 1983 at 6:45 in the evening in Columbia, TN. Johnny Felker and I sat at a table in Calvary Tabernacle, minutes away from me engaging Milton Paulk (an Apostolic Pentecostal preacher), in a debate on Holy Spirit Baptism.
 - A. Paulk and I had agreed to offer one another five questions before each nightly session, all of which was to be answered in our first speech.
 - B. When I received his questions to me on that first night, he had worded each question in such a unique way that, from my perspective, he was asking everything either I didn't know or was unsure of about "the gift of the Holy Spirit" — addressing almost everything we debate among ourselves about the subject.
 1. I understood, very well, *what his questions didn't mean*, but for a moment I didn't know the best way to answer.
 2. Until, that is, I realized that he was not asking these questions from my frame of reference but from his. Then the answers came easy, and while not exactly what he preferred, were acceptable to him.
- II. I relate that incident for two purposes...
 - A. To say that when we are talking about "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (or any other question related to God for that matter) we are walking on holy ground, and even if we do not literally remove our sandals, we need to show the subject the respect it deserves.
 - B. But also to say that good men, great Bible students with great minds, have discussed and debated this subject for many years without coming to unanimous consent.
 1. It is a point of interest to me that a passage so easy to understand on the subject of repentance and baptism could be so difficult when it comes unanimity of understanding on what is meant by "the gift of the Holy Spirit."
 2. I have delusions of grandeur. I do not believe that I will settle this matter once and for all in this lesson. I am not going to be able to do what others far superior than I have been unable to do.
- III. Alexander Campbell expressed my sentiments exactly in 1834 when he wrote of this subject...

"Patience in the investigation, openness to conviction, and a freedom from dogmatism are, on all abstruse and difficult questions and especially on this cardinal matter of indispensable importance

to the discovery of the truth...” (Millennial Harbinger, Vol. 5, 169-170)

- IV. In order to get this subject clearly in focus, please understand:
- A. The question is not, “*Does the Holy Spirit dwell in us today?*” I believe He does.
 - B. The question is not, “*How does the Holy Spirit indwell us today?*” Candidly, I believe that the Holy Spirit dwells in us today in a relational way (cf. Jn. 15:1-8, etc.). But, that’s another question for another lesson.
 - C. The question before me is: “What is the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38?”
- V. I believe “the gift of the Holy Spirit” in Acts 2:38 to be the promise of miraculous spiritual gifts given by the laying on of the apostles hands. My task is to show why I believe this to be so.
- VI. This is neither a new or strange view of “the gift of the Holy Spirit” in Acts 2:38...
- A. **Alexander Campbell (1788-1866):** “We have this phrase, the gift of the Holy Spirit, as has been said, but twice, in all the apostolic writings; —Acts ii. 38, and x. 45, both of which denote all that is comprehended in the promise of Joel, the Holy Spirit in all his miraculous powers” (*Millennial Harbinger*, Vol 5, 172).
 - B. **T. W. Brents (1823-1905):** “...it may not be amiss to state that, as the apostles had power to communicate the Spirit in an extraordinary measure to such as believed and obeyed the gospel under their ministry, and as they deemed it so important that the primitive Christians should thus extraordinarily receive it, as to send Peter and John from Jerusalem to Samaria to confer it upon the disciples first made there we are inclined to think that Peter intended to promise something more than the ordinary measure of the Spirit to those he addressed at the beginning. Surely it was as important that the first disciples made at Jerusalem should receive the extraordinary endowment as it was that those of Samaria, Ephesus, and other places should receive it. Nay, more; there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven, and it is fair to suppose that some of every nation were converted on that occasion; and it is more probable that it was through these men that the commission was carried out... Hence, we conclude that Peter promised the Spirit to such as would believe and obey the gospel there in as ample measure as he had power to impart it to them. Why should he not thus amply bestow it upon them without apprising them of it, that he might afford them an agreeable surprise? But as a settlement of this matter could have no practical bearing upon our investigation, the subject is not worth debating, and we will not consume further space with it.” (*The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, 597-598).

- C. **Z. T. Sweeney (1849-1926):** “We are not enabled to reach two conclusions of importance: First, the ‘gift of the Spirit’ was a supernatural gift for the promise of enabling the ‘believers’ in apostolic days to work the ‘signs’ which Christ said should accompany them that believe, and ceased when the signs ceased. Second, many of the exhortations of the New Testament writers were to a church whose members were filled with supernatural power of the Spirit, and should be interpreted in the light of that fact.” (*The Spirit and the Word*, Guardian of Truth, 95)
- D. **David Lipscomb (1831-1917):** “The gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) is the bestowal of the Spirit, possibly in His miraculous manifestations.” (undocumented quote found in *The Work of the Holy Spirit* by Franklin Camp, 131)
- E. **Joe Warlick (1866-1941):** “... has reference alone to that gift of the Holy Ghost which the apostles imposed on the people through the imposition of hands. When they baptized people, then they laid their hands on them and gave this gift.” (*Gospel Guide*, 1920, quoted by Robert Taylor, Jr. in *The Bible Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 99).
- F. **H. Leo Boles (1874-1946):** Much controversy exists as to whether this meant the Holy Spirit as a gift in that measure that the apostle now enjoyed, or whether “the gift of the Holy Spirit” was the ordinary measure that belonged to all Christians. It seems that some of the early Christians received a miraculous measure of the Holy Spirit, and that is what Peter meant. Joel had been quoted by Peter as being fulfilled at this time; hence, the Spirit dispensation was now beginning and those who obeyed the gospel would receive all the blessings promised by this dispensation” (*Commentary on Acts*, Gospel Advocate Company, 47-48).
- G. **Guy N. Woods (1908-1993):** “But, what is the gift of the Holy Spirit, in Acts 2:38? For well over a third of a century I have believed and taught that it was, a) a miraculous bestowal of power by the Holy Spirit; b) it was conferred by the laying of the hands of the apostles, and not simply or solely because those receiving it were baptized, thus not a *necessary* consequence of baptism, and c) its promise was limited to the period of miraculous activity in the early church while the word was being confirmed.” (*Questions and Answers*, Freed-Hardeman Lectures, 57).
- H. **Franklin Camp (1915-1991):** “I believe that the Scriptures teach that the gift of the Holy Spirit refers to miraculous endowments that belonged to the period when these miraculous gifts were for the purpose of confirming the apostles of Christ as His apostles and providing the church with inspiration through these gifts that came through the laying on of the hands of an apostles.” (*The Work of the Holy Spirit*, 131)

- I. **Robert Taylor, Jr.:** “For many years it has been my seasoned conviction that Peter had the miraculous in mind and that it necessarily demanded apostolic imposition of hands and was of limited duration — not one concurrent with the Christian Age.” (*The Bible Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 94)
 - J. **Johnny Stringer:** It is reasonable to interpret Peter’s promise regarding the gift of the Holy Spirit in the light of Joel’s prophecy, which he had quoted, regarding the Spirit’s coming to all flesh. That prophecy obviously had reference to the apostles and to Christians who would receive miraculous powers through the laying on of the apostles’ hands. The people in Peter’s audience had seen the Spirit’s miraculous manifestations in the apostles and had heard Peter quote a prophecy in which the Spirit’s miraculous powers were promised to all flesh. We should consider what would naturally have come to their minds when they heard Peter’s promise that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It seems difficult to picture them, following their baptism, asking the apostles about the gift of the Holy Spirit that he had promised them, and being told that they had already received it. It seems more likely that their experience was like that of the Ephesians in Acts 19:5-6.” (*The Book of Acts*, Truth Commentaries, Guardian of Truth Foundation, 46-47).
 - K. **James R. (Jim) Cope:** “Convincingly he argues that ‘the gift of the Holy Spirit’ in Acts 2:38 was miraculous just as miraculous as was ‘the gift of the Holy Spirit’ in Acts 10:45... I consider it the outstanding book on the subject ever to come to my attention. Maybe I like it because the author says many things I have believed for many years.” (*Franklin Camp’s Book on the Holy Spirit*, Reviewed by James R. Cope, Truth Magazine, XVIII:39, 2).
- VII. With the admonitions for all of us to remember, 1) Occam’s Razor, and 2) that the Bible is its own best commentary, let’s look at “the gift of the Holy Spirit” in Acts 2:38...

Discussion

I. “The gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38) in its context.

- A. The book of Acts has correctly been called “Luke: Volume II”
 - 1. Both Luke and Acts were written by “the beloved physician” (Col. 4:14).
 - 2. Both were written to a prominent Gentile named Theophilus.
 - 3. The gospel of Luke purports to be a thoroughly researched and carefully detailed chronological account of the life of Jesus (Lk. 1:1-4).
 - 4. The historical narrative of Acts picks up where the gospel ends.

- B. Acts 1 is somewhat a preamble to the historical narrative that begins in Acts 2.
1. Jesus had presented himself alive “by many convincing proofs” over a period of 40 days (1:3).
 2. At the end of those 40 days, Jesus led His disciples to Bethany, to the Mount of Olives, where he gave them final instruction.
 - a. He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem until they received the *promise* of the Father (1:4).
 - b. He reminded them of John’s prophecy/promise (1:5).
 - c. He promised them miraculous power when the Spirit came upon them (1:8).
 - d. He gave them, one final time, the great commission (1:8) which, itself, serves as an outline of the book of Acts.
 3. At the end of His instruction, Jesus ascended through the clouds to the right hand of the Father (1:9).
 4. The apostles did as Jesus instructed and returned to the city to wait.
- C. **Acts 2:1-40** (read)
1. **2:1-4** — The baptism of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, evidenced by their speaking in languages they had not studied.
 2. **2:5-13** — The reaction of the people who gathered together.
 - a. Present were “devout men of every nation” (2:5).
 - b. They came together hearing the apostles speak, not just in Hebrew or Greek, but in “their own language” (2:8)
 - c. This sections ends with their important question: “*What does this mean?*” (2:12). “*This*” refers to hearing the mighty deeds of God spoken miraculously in their own language.
 3. **2:14-21** — Peter answers their question — “*this* is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel” (2:16).
 - a. Please argue backward with me for a moment...
 - (1) The prophecy of Joel was the answer to their question: “What does *this* mean?”
 - (2) “*This*” refers to the speaking in tongues by the apostles.
 - (3) The speaking in tongues by the apostles is connected by Luke to the “*power*” Jesus promised.
 - (4) The *power* Jesus promised is connected by Luke with the *promise* of John.

- b. Hence, John’s *promise* of Holy Spirit baptism looked *forward* to Pentecost and it also looks *backward* to Joel’s prophecy.
 - (1) I believe that Joel’s prophecy becomes the background to everything that is said in the New Testament regarding the miraculous outpouring of the Spirit.
- 4. **2:17-18** — A closer look at Joel’s prophecy...
 - a. Most explanations of Joel’s prophecy focuses, “I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind...”
 - (1) Commonly explained as “Jew and Gentile” (Acts 2 & 10)
 - b. While this is good as far as it goes, there is a better, fuller explanation: “I will pour forth of My Spirit...”
 - (1) “on all mankind” — without regard to *nationality*
 - (2) “your sons... daughters” — without regard to *gender*
 - (3) “young... old men” — without regard to *age*
 - (4) “My bondslaves both men and women” — without regard to *social status*.
 - c. In general, the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the first century did three things...
 - (1) It served through its many specific gifts to *reveal God’s word* and make the Great Commission and the order of the churches possible — in the absence of a complete codified document.
 - (2) It served through “signs, wonders, miracles, and various gifts of the Holy Spirit” (Heb. 2:3-4) to confirm the spoken word as coming from God.
 - (3) It served as testimony to universal access to God — that *all* were equal before God, *all* had the same access! This was THE major issue of the first century!
 - (a) Babylonian Talmud: Menahoth 43b-44a. A Jewish man is obligated to say the following prayer every day: “Thank you God for not making me a Gentile, a woman or a slave.” (Think about Joel’s prophecy in the light of that prayer - jhd).
 - (b) Further, this is *the point* of Paul’s argument in Galatians 3:1-5, 23-29 in defense of his apostleship and confirmation that the Galatians — Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female “are all one in Christ Jesus.”

- i) They were the sons of God by faith, not through the Law (more on this later).
 - ii) And that was proven/confirmed by their miraculous reception of the Spirit.
- 5. **2:22-36** — Peter’s sermon. Five proofs that Jesus is the Christ.
 - a. His miracles (2:22)
 - b. His resurrection (2:24)
 - c. Fulfillment of prophecy (2:25-31)
 - d. Witness of the apostles (2:33)
 - e. Testimony of the Spirit — “the *promise* of the Spirit” (2:33)
 - f. Conclusion: “Know for certain (believe with assurance) that God has made Him both Lord and Christ” — Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah of O.T. prophecy.
- 6. **2:37-38** — The crowd’s reaction, a command, and the promise of “the gift of the Holy Spirit.”
 - a. “Brethren, what shall we do?” Essentially, “we believe, what now?”
 - b. “Repent, and... be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (turn, change, and obey — become a disciple of Jesus, submit to His authority).
 - c. “For the remission of sins” — “unto” or “in order to obtain”
 - d. “And you will receive *the gift of the Holy Spirit*”. Consider this:
 - (1) The people had seen the miraculous manifestations in the apostles.
 - (2) The people had heard Peter quote Joel’s promise of a general outpouring of the H.S.; he referred to it as “the *promise* of the H.S.” in verse 33.
 - (3) *What else were they to think but that Peter was promising the same thing Joel promised, i.e. the miraculous outpouring of the H.S.?*
 - (a) **Johnny Stringer:** It is reasonable to interpret Peter’s promise regarding the gift of the Holy Spirit in the light of Joel’s prophecy, which he had quoted, regarding the Spirit’s coming to all flesh. That prophecy obviously had reference to the apostles and to Christians who would receive miraculous powers through the laying on of the apostles’ hands.” (*The Book of Acts*, Truth Commentaries, Guardian of Truth Foundation, 46-47).

- (b) **Franklin Camp:** ‘Since Peter was explaining Joel’s prophecy, and the prophecy included spiritual gifts... would it not be reasonable to conclude that Peter’s promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit to believers would be what the prophecy promised? Joel’s prophecy was the basis of Peter’s discussion of the Holy Spirit.’ (*The Work of the Holy Spirit*, 149)
- (4) Imagine one of the three thousand, immediately after being baptized asking, “where is the gift of the Holy Spirit?” What is Peter’s *best* answer?
- (a) “Oh, you’ve already been given the ‘ordinary measure’ of the Spirit, you just don’t realize it,” Or...
- (b) To lay hands on him and give him the exact thing Joel prophesied like he did in Samaria (Acts 8), or Paul did in Ephesus (Acts 19)? (more on this later).
7. **Acts 2:39** — The “promise is to you...”
- a. Among those who believe as I do, i.e., “the gift of the H.S.” is the promise of the miraculous through the laying of the apostles hands, there are two opposing views on this passage:
- (1) **Guy N. Woods:** “The ‘promise’ here has no direct reference to the Holy Spirit; it is designated **God’s plan to give salvation to Jew and Gentile through Christ. ‘The promise’ was God’s promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; Gal. 3:29)**. This, the passage actually asserts: “For the promise is unto you (Jews) and to your children (children of Jews), and to all that are afar off” (Gentiles). (Eph. 2:11-13). Thus, simply to Jew and Gentile was salvation to be available as God had promised the illustrious patriarch, and received through his unique descendent—Christ.” (*Questions and Answers*, Freed-Hardeman Lectures, 58, emphasis mine - jhd).
- (2) **“Johnny Stringer:** “To what promise, which included so many people as recipients of the gift of the Holy Spirit, did Peter refer? It seems reasonable that he had reference to the promise he had quoted regarding the Spirit — that is, the promise in Joel’s prophecy” (*The Book of Acts*, Truth Commentaries, Guardian of Truth Foundation, 46-47).
- (3) While Woods’ view seems to be the most popular among us, I believe Stringer’s view to be more in harmony with the context.
- (4) **Franklin Camp:** A passage should always be studied in its context. Peter began his sermon with the prophecy of Joel and, as recorded by Luke, closed it with a summary of the prophecy.

This is the thought through the chapter and with this in mind there will be no difficulty in seeing that verse 39 is a summary of Joel's prophecy. The question was about the miraculous (Acts 2:12 points back to Acts 2:1-4). Peter's reply was a prophecy that contained a promise of the miraculous. Peter referred to the promise of the Father in Acts 2:33 which can only be traced back to Joel's prophecy. (See Luke 24:49.) Since Peter had used the word "promise" in verse 33, which was based on Joel's prophecy, and Joel's prophecy included miraculous gifts without distinction to believers, why should the promise of Acts 2:39 refer to anything else? (*The Work of the Holy Spirit*, 151)

b. I view Acts 2:39 as a summary of Acts 2:17-18...

Acts 2:17-18	Acts 2:39
	"To promise is to you... (obedient believers on Pentecost)
"Your sons, daughters" (Jews)	"Your children"
"all mankind" (<i>all</i> nations, incl. Samaritans, Gentiles, etc.	"all that are afar off"
"Young, old, bondslaves"	"As many as the Lord our God will call to Himself"

II. This view harmonizes with other passages...

A. Mark 16:15-20

1. Like Matthew 3:11, this passage has Pentecost in its foreground and Joel 2 as it's background
2. This is the Great Commission and its parallel's to Acts 2 are obvious:

Mark 16:15-17		Acts 2:38
“Go... preach... all creation”	→	“you shall be my witnesses... Jerusalem... Judea... Samaria... remotest part of the earth... (1:8)
“believed... baptized... saved.	→	“Repent... baptized... forgiveness of sins...”
“These signs will accompany those who have believed...”	→	“...you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”

- a. One need only to remember that in carrying out the commission, *the early church was dependent upon these miraculous spiritual gifts to both reveal the word of God, to confirm it, and to show that all (regardless of nationality, gender, age or social status) had access to God.*

B. Acts 8:12-17

1. Again, this passage has the prophet Joel, the Great Commission, and Pentecost in the background.

Mark 16:15-17		Acts 2:38		Acts 8:12-18
“Go... preach... all creation”	→	“you shall be my witnesses... Jerusalem... Judea... Samaria... remotest part of the earth... (1:8)	→	“Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom...” (12)
“believed... baptized... saved.	→	“Repent... baptized... forgiveness of sins...”	→	“they believed Philip... were being baptized...”
“These signs will accompany those who have believed...”	→	“...you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”	→	“they (Peter and John - jhd) began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit”

2. Notice carefully the order of what took place in Samaria — they believed, were baptized, BUT, the Holy Spirit “had not yet fallen upon any of them, they had simply been baptized...” (Acts 8:16).
3. It was only *after* the apostles had laid their hands on the obedient Samaritans that it is said they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17).

C. Acts 19:1-6

Mark 16:15-17		Acts 2:38		Acts 8:12-18		Acts 19
“Go... preach... all creation”	→	“you shall be my witnesses... Jerusalem... Judea... Samaria... remotest part of the earth... (1:8)	→	“Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom...” (12)	→	“Paul, ‘John baptized... telling them to believe in... Jesus’”
“believed... baptized... saved.	→	“Repent... baptized... forgiveness of sins...”	→	“they believed Philip... were being baptized...”	→	“When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus”
“ These signs will accompany those who have believed...”	→	“...you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit ”	→	“they (Peter and John - jhd) began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit ”	→	“Paul... laid his hand upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them , and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying”

1. Paul came to Ephesus and found disciples of John.
2. He asked “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (2).
 - a. Is it reasonable to think that he was asking about some non-miraculous indwelling in this passage?
 - b. How would they have known, how would it have been demonstrated, whether they had or not?
3. They respond, “No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” (2)
 - a. As John’s disciples, did they not know at all about the Holy Spirit? His person and work in the Old Testament? Of his prophecy in Matthew 3:11?
 - b. More likely, we have not even heard whether *the Holy Spirit has been given*” (cf. marginal reading NASB95).

4. Paul questioned their baptism and learned they had been baptized with John's baptism.
 5. Paul pointed them to faith in Jesus (4), and they were "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (5).
 6. "When Paul laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying" (6).
 7. Acts 19:5-6 parallel's perfectly Mark 16:15-17; Acts 2:38 and Acts 8:12-18
- D. Four passages that, in my mind, clearly explain the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel.

III. A look at the phrase "the gift of the Holy Spirit."

- A. Much debate has taken place over the grammatical structure of this phrase: The questions, as I understand it are these:
1. Is the phrase "the Holy Spirit" *objective genitive* (which means that the Holy Spirit is the gift)?
 2. Or, is it *subjective genitive* (meaning the gift is something the Holy Spirit gives)?
 3. Some additionally refer to the *genitive of apposition*, or the *ablative case*.
 4. Honestly, I am not qualified to enter this discussion. I'm not 100% sure I've even framed the discussion correctly. I'll leave that to the Greek scholars to decide.
- B. I can see how some scholars have treated it:
1. Some modern translations boldly declare that the Holy Spirit is the gift:

God's Word
 "...Then you will receive the Holy Spirit as a gift"

Good News Bible
 "...and you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit"

International Standard Version
 "... Then you will receive the Holy Spirit as a gift"

The Living Bible
 "...then you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit"

2. Other scholars view “the gift of the Holy Spirit” in the same way they view “the gift of God.”

Jn 4:10
“If you knew *the gift of God*, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink’...

Acts 8:20
“...you thought you could obtain *the gift of God* with money”

Rom 6:23
“...the free *gift of God* is eternal life...”
- C. Some quotes that might help (and give a little comfort)...
1. **Franklin Puckett:** “Is it the Holy Spirit Himself as a divine Being bestowed on those who repent and are baptized? Or is it something which the Holy Spirit bestows on those who repent and are baptized? The answer cannot be decided on the basis of grammatical structure or possible definitions, but will have to be determined contextually and according to doctrinal truth.” (*The Holy Spirit*, 18).
 2. **Marion R. Fox:** “Any honest authority of the Greek language will admit that this is all a matter of interpretation and that there is nothing in the text of Acts 2:38 that demands that it be either the genitive of apposition, the objective genitive, the subjective genitive, or the ablative case.” (*The Work of the Holy Spirit*, Vol 1, 351).
 3. These two men hold vastly different views on the subject at hand. Yet *both believe that the answer is not to be found in the grammar itself*, but rather contextually and in harmony with other Bible teaching.
 4. This may very well be why most reputable translations render the phrase “and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,” then, leave the reader to best determine the meaning.
- D. I understand why, to some, this grammatical debate is important. But, from my frame of reference, I’m not sure it makes a lot of difference...
1. If “the gift of the Holy Spirit” is a gift the Holy Spirit gives (and I lean a little toward this view), then we are left only to determine *what* that gift is.
 2. If “the gift of the Holy Spirit” is the Holy Spirit as a gift, then we have to ask if this is a case of the use of metonymy of cause (cf. Lk. 11:9 and Matt. 7:11; Lk. 16:29)? [See D. R. Dungan’s *Hermeneutics* under Sec. 59. Metonymy of the Cause, 271].
 3. To this point, I have rejected the idea of a literal, personal, indwelling of the H.S. for believers today.

- E. Here is something I think is even more significant. This exact phrase, “the gift of the Holy Spirit,” is found only twice in Scripture: Acts 2:38 and Acts 10:45.
1. Albeit received by different means, no one questions that Acts 10:45 was a miraculous endowment of the Spirit.
 2. Yet, some conclude that Acts 2:38 is a non-miraculous gift of the Spirit.
 3. Is it not strange that we interpret the identical phrase one way in one passage and another way in another?

IV. A study of the word “gift” (*dorea*) in relation to the Holy Spirit.

- A. The word “gift” (*dorea*) is used 11 times in the New Testament (Jn. 4:10; **Acts 2:38; 8:20; 10:45; 11:17**; Rom. 5:17; 2 Cor. 9:15; **Eph. 3:7; 4:7**; Heb. 6:4). Six of those times the word is used in clear connection with the Holy Spirit...

“Gift of the Holy Spirit”	Ac 2:38	??
“Gift of God”	Ac 8:20	Miraculous
“Gift of the Holy Spirit”	Ac 10:45	Miraculous
“Like gift”	Ac 11:17	Miraculous
“The gift of the measure of Christ”	Eph 3:7	Miraculous
“The measure of the gift of Christ”	Eph 4:7	Miraculous

B. **Acts 2:38**

1. I’ve already shown that I believe this passage is referring to miraculous gifts given by the laying on of the apostles hands.
2. I pass over further discussion of this passage because I want to look at other passages in support of this view.

C. **Acts 8:20** — Note the context (Acts 8:12-17)

1. The Samaritans believed and were baptized but yet the Holy Spirit had “not fallen upon any of them” (16).
2. Peter and John was sent from Jerusalem. Upon laying their hands on the Samaritans “they were receiving the Holy Spirit” (17)
3. This was something Simon could see (18-19), and he wanted to buy the power to do what the apostles were able to do.

4. In this passage (20), the gift of the Holy Spirit is called “the gift (*dorea*) of God” and is obviously miraculous”

D. Acts 10:45

1. This is in the household of Cornelius. As Peter “began to speak” (11:15), the H.S. fell upon all who were listening (10:44).
2. The circumcised believers observed that “the gift (*dorea*) of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also (10:45)
3. The reason they could observe this is because, “they were hearing them speak with tongues” (10:46). Obviously miraculous.

E. Acts 11:17

1. This text is but a retelling of Acts 10, this time before the Jews in Jerusalem.
2. In this passage, Peter said that “God gave to them the same “gift” (*dorea*) as He gave to us...” (17) — obviously miraculous.

F. Eph. 3:7

1. Here reference is made to the “gift (*dorea*) of God’s grace”, i.e., God’s direct inspired revelation to him (2-5), and his work as an apostle.
2. He was “made a minister according to the gift of God grace” by “the working of His power” (cf. Acts 26:16-18) — obviously miraculous.

G. Eph. 4:7

1. Here reference is made to “the measure of Christ’s gift (*dorea*)?”
2. Jesus’ ascension is in view (8-9). He promised His apostles: “...*it is to your advantage that I go away*; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but *if I go, I will send Him to you*” (Jn 16:7).
3. The promise of the “Helper” (Jn 16:7) is equivalent to “that He might fill all things” (Eph. 4:10).
4. Whether you see the gifts of verse 11 as, 1) men given these specific roles, or, 2) as the roles themselves filled by men, is of little consequence. These were apparently miraculous gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:28).

- H. I think we would be pretty much be in complete agreement that five of these six passages are referring to the miraculous operations of the Spirit. Does it not strike you as strange that, in five of these passages the miraculous is under consideration, but in one we claim it to be non-miraculous?

V. A study of the word “receive” (*lambano*) in relation to the Holy Spirit.

- A. Having studied the word “gift” (*dorea*) when used in reference to the Holy Spirit, let’s do the same with the word “receive” (*lambano*). What do we learn when we read of people “receiving” the Holy Spirit?

“But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive...”	John 7:39	Miraculous
“...Receive the Holy Spirit”	John 20:21	Miraculous
“...you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”	Acts 2:38	????
“...they were receiving the Holy Spirit”	Acts 8:15,17	Miraculous
“...who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did...”	Acts 10:47	Miraculous
“... Did you receive the Holy Spirit...”	Acts 19:2,6	Miraculous
“... did you receive the Holy Spirit...”	Gal. 3:2,5	Miraculous
“... “the anointing which you received from Him...”	1 Jn. 2:27	Miraculous

B. Jn 7:39

1. This is the *first* time the word “receive” is used in reference to the Holy Spirit.
2. To drink of the “living water” of Jesus was to believe and obey his teaching. The obedient believer, then, becomes a fountain of blessing to others.
3. Verse 39 is John’s explanation and inspired interpretation of what Jesus said. John connected the giving of the Spirit with what would happen following the “glorification” of Jesus.

- a. Jesus was “glorified” upon His ascension and coronation (Dan. 7:13-14; Jn 17:4-5; Phil 2:9-11).
- b. The fulfillment of John’s statement in verse 39 is seen in Acts 2 and the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17-21).
4. “Receiving” the Spirit in John 7:39 refers to the Spirit in all His miraculous manifestations.
5. This passage is also parallel with Mark 16:16-17...

John 7:38-39	Mark 16:16-17
“He who believes in Me...”	“He who has believed and has been baptized...”
“But this He spoke of The Spirit, whom these who believed in Him were to receive...”	“These signs will accompany those who have believed...”

C. Jn 20:21-23

1. This is the *second* time the word “receive” is used in reference to the Holy Spirit.
2. I believe this to be John’s reference to the Great Commission. The question arises: When did the apostles “receive” the Spirit?
 - a. Not at that moment *because* their commission did not begin at that moment (“stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Lk 24:49; cf. Acts 1:4-8).
 - b. Not at that *moment* because the message they were to proclaim would not be valid until Pentecost.
 - c. We have to conclude that the apostles “received” the Spirit when they were baptized with Spirit on Pentecost.
3. “Receiving” the Spirit in John 20:22 refers to miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

D. Acts 2:38

1. This is the *third* time the word “receive” is used in reference to the H.S.
2. Having already discussed it, and since this is the passage under consideration, I’ll observe the “Passover” on it and reserve comment until my conclusion.

E. **Acts 8:15-17**

1. This is the *fourth* time the word “receive” is used in reference to the Holy Spirit.
2. Peter and John were sent to Samaria that those who had obeyed the gospel might “receive” the Holy Spirit (15).
3. Peter and John began laying their hands on them and they were “receiving” the Holy Spirit” (17). [This was something Simon *saw*].
4. “Receiving” the Holy Spirit in Acts 8:15,17 refers to a miraculous spiritual gift (the specific gift each received is unspecified in the text).

F. **Acts 10:47**

1. This is the *fifth* time the word “receive” is used in reference to the Holy Spirit.
2. It refers to the baptism of the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:44-45; 11:15-17).
3. “Receiving” the Holy Spirit in Acts 10:47 refers to a miraculous manifestation of the Spirit.

G. **Acts 19:2,6**

1. This is the *sixth* time the word “receive” is used in reference to the Holy Spirit.
2. We are in Ephesus and Paul asks them: Did you “receive” the Holy Spirit...?
3. When he “laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying” (6)
4. “Receiving” the Holy Spirit in Acts 19:2 refers to a miraculous manifestation of the Spirit.

H. **Gal. 3:2**

1. This is the *seventh* time the word “receive” is used in reference to the Holy Spirit.
2. Paul asked: ...did you “receive” the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

3. He explained what he meant: “does he who provides you with the Spirit and *works miracles among you*, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith”
4. “Receiving” the Holy Spirit in Gal. 3:2 refers to a miraculous manifestation of the Spirit.

I. **1 Jn 2:27**

1. This is the *eighth* time the word “receive” is used in reference to the Holy Spirit.
2. The “anointing” in this passage undoubtedly refers to a miraculous spiritual gift relating to revelation because they had “no need for anyone to teach you”
3. This was an “anointing which you ‘*received*’ from Him”
4. “Receiving” the anointing in 1 John 2:27 refers to a miraculous manifestation of the Spirit.

VI. Some objections briefly considered...

A. **Objection #1:** The “gift of the Holy Spirit” refers to the promise of salvation/eternal life, not miraculous spiritual gifts.

1. This is an attractive position, one of the most popular views held among us, and deserves careful consideration.
 - a. The phrase “the promise” is often used where reference is made to the promise(s) of Abraham (Acts 7:17; Rom. 4:13-14,16,20; Gal. 3:16-18; Heb. 6:13,15,17) — which promise is related to redemption through Jesus Christ.
 - b. Joel references the promise of salvation to all those who “call on the name of the Lord” (Acts 2:12; cf. Rom. 10:13).
2. My answer:
 - a. “For” (*gar*) (Acts 2:39) is a “1. marker of cause or reason” (BDAG), hence, introducing the reason for the preceding statement (cf. Gal. 3:26-27) regarding the “gift of the H.S.”
 - b. The *promise* of the gift of the H.S. points to references in Acts 2:16,33.
 - c. There is no reference to Abraham nor the “promise” given to Abraham in Acts 2.

- B. **Objection #2:** The “gift of the Holy Spirit” refers to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (either personal or relational) in all believers for all time.
1. cf. Mark White’s lecture...
- C. **Objection #3:** Did all Christians in the first century receive miraculous spiritual gifts?
1. Argument stated in syllogism:
 - a. Major Premise: Both remission of sins and the gift of the H.S. (miraculous gifts) is promised to all who repent and are baptized.
 - b. Minor Premise: The gift of the Holy Spirit (miraculous gifts) was promised to “*all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.*”
 - c. Conclusion: All that God “*will call to Himself*” possessed the gift of the Holy Spirit (miraculous gifts).
 2. My answer: The point of this argument is show that I must believe that *all* Christians in the first century had to possess miraculous gifts. This is not the case.
 - a. The minor premise assumes the mechanism by which spiritual gifts were imparted (the laying on of apostles hands) were always present.
 - b. The argument doesn’t address the equivalent general language in Mark 16:17, nor in Acts 2:16-17 (all of us have to deal with the *limitations of general promises* regarding the miraculous).
 - c. This argument doesn’t address the duration of miraculous spiritual gifts. This exact argument is made by the Pentecostals with regard to the duration of spiritual gifts.
- D. **Objection #4:** The Scriptures are silent with regard to the practice of spiritual gifts in Jerusalem until Acts 6:8.
1. Is not the promise itself evidence?
 2. Does silence indicate that no one possessed or practiced spiritual gifts or is it just silence? (Does the silence of the Scriptures regarding spiritual gifts in other churches indicate that they possessed none?).
 3. Consider what happened in Samaria (Acts 8) and its implications.
 - a. Once the Samaritans heard and obeyed the gospel, the apostles in Jerusalem thought it important enough to send Peter and John to lay hands on them to impart miraculous gifts.
 - b. Would they have done something for the Samaritan’s that *they had not done* for their brethren in Judea and Jerusalem?

4. Which best explains the phenomenal growth of the Jerusalem church
 - a. Only inspired apostles did the teaching (and confirmation of the word)? Or...
 - b. Teaching was done by *inspired* apostles and other *uninspired* men? Or...
 - c. Inspired teaching/confirmation by miraculous spiritual gifts was done by both the apostles and others upon whom they had laid hands?

Conclusion

- I. For this reason:
 - A. Because I believe that the context of Acts 2:38 favors the view that the “gift of the Holy Spirit” refers to miraculous gifts through the laying on of the apostles hands, AND...
 - B. Because the specific phrase, “the gift of the Holy Spirit” is used only twice in Scripture (Acts 2:38; 10:45), each referring to a miraculous endowment, AND...
 - C. Because the word “gift” (*dorea*) when used in reference to the Holy Spirit refers to a miraculous gift/gifts, AND...
 - D. Because when people “received” (*lambano*) the Holy Spirit it always referred to a miraculous manifestation...
- II. I believe that my proposition, that “the gift of the Holy Spirit” in Acts 2:38 refers to the promise of miraculous spiritual gifts given by the laying on of the apostles hands...
 - A. *Is neither new nor novel.*
 - B. *Is possible.* Is it impossible that the “gift” in Acts 2:38 be miraculous spiritual gifts? Even if you disagree, I’m not sure *most* would think it impossible.
 - C. *Is probable.* Based merely upon the preponderance of the evidence, I think it moves from the possible to the probable.
 - D. *Is sustained.* I believe so. Even if you do disagree, I don’t believe that you can summarily dismiss this position. I hope, at the very least, I have challenged your thinking to further study and discussion.