

The Holy Spirit's Role in Conversion

by Bryan Gibson

Jesus made a promise to His **apostles**, that He would baptize **them** with the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5, 8). Jesus made another promise regarding the Holy Spirit, this one with a more **general** application: “And when He has come, He will convict the **world** of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8). Read the surrounding verses and you can see that Jesus is clearly talking about the Holy Spirit. Remember this promise, because we will come back to it shortly.

The best way to understand the Holy Spirit's role in conversion is to look at the actual cases of conversion recorded in the Book of Acts. What role did the Holy Spirit play in these conversions? He did just what Jesus said He would do—He convicted these people of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. How did He accomplish that? He did it through the preaching of the gospel, which shouldn't surprise us in the least, because the gospel is “the power of God to salvation” (Romans 1:16). Yes, the gospel was preached by men, but they preached it “by the Holy Spirit” (1 Peter 1:12), because the words they spoke were revealed by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:6-13; Ephesians 3:1-5). Jesus had this to say about the life-giving power of these words: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). This same life-giving power is also seen in this passage: “having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God...” (1 Peter 1:23); and in this one: “Of His own will, He brought us forth by the word of truth...” (James 1:18).

To illustrate, consider the conversion of some Jews in Acts 2. Notice verse 37 in particular: “Now **when they heard this**, they were **cut to the heart**, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” This is exactly what Jesus was talking about—these people were convicted by the Holy Spirit, because the gospel Peter preached to them was revealed by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4). Study the conversions one by one, and you will see this same truth illustrated over and over again. Pay close attention to how they responded **when they heard the gospel**, and realize that this is the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion.

Of course, the Holy Spirit does not convict everyone—the Book of Acts also contains cases of non-conversion. Some were not converted, because they did not receive the word “with meekness” (James 1:21). The problem was not with the Holy Spirit, or with the words He revealed; the problem was with the hearers. As Stephen said to his audience, “You always resist the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:51). The gospel is compared to a fragrance in 2 Corinthians 2—to some it is the “aroma of death,” to others it is the “aroma of life” (2 Corinthians 2:14-16).

We urge all of our readers to give close attention to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Welcome it “not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). It will tell you “words by which you and all your household will be saved” (Acts 11:14). Give the gospel a fair hearing, and the Holy Spirit will convict you of your sin; He will show you how

to be right with God; and He will impress upon you the urgency of it all by warning you of the judgment to come.