

How did YOU receive the Holy Spirit?

The apostle Paul wrote a letter to the Galatian brethren exposing their error of accepting syncretistic doctrines of the Mosaic Law mingled with the Law of Christ. Paul posed a question to the Galatian brethren that, when answered, would help them determine how justification (acquittal of sins) was obtained. Paul said, “*This only would I learn from you, received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*” (Gal. 3:2). When answered honestly, the Galatians would be left understanding that there is no other teaching that leads to justification but the doctrine of Jesus Christ alone.

Background

There were false teachers who had come to Galatia that caused the brethren to question Paul’s apostleship and teaching through bewitching doctrines of men (Gal. 3:1). Paul ably proved to the Galatian brethren that the message he preached was of divine origin in chapter one (cf. Gal. 1:12). Secondly, Paul proved that his message was independent of the other apostles (Gal. 1:13-24). Though the message was the same as the other apostles, Paul needed no man to teach him the gospel because he was an apostle of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Paul was given the right hand of fellowship by the other apostles and elders of the church in Jerusalem when in Acts 15 the Judaizing teachers were charging him with preaching a different gospel than the other apostles (cf. Gal. 2:9). Said fellowship between the apostles and elders of Jerusalem and Paul was devastating to the objective of the false teachers.

The Galatians 3:2 Question

The Galatians had been convinced that justification of sins was obtained by mixing the Mosaic Law with the Law of Christ (the subject of the Acts 15 Jerusalem conference). Judaizing teachers had swayed the brethren away from the gospel by a “*different doctrine*” (Gal. 1:6). Paul therefore posed the question: “*This only would I learn from you, received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*” (Gal. 3:2). Paul was simply asking the Galatian brethren how fellowship with the Holy Spirit occurred. The answer to this question is simple. Hearing the gospel is how one obtains faith (Rom. 10:17). Those who have faith in justification through Jesus Christ are termed “*begotten of God*” (I Jn. 5:1). Paul told us that those who had heard the gospel and were converted into a Christian as a result are termed “*born of the Spirit*” (I Cor. 12:13). Said Christians “*walk in the Spirit*” (Gal. 5:16) and are “*led by the Spirit*” (Gal. 5:18). Without receiving the Holy Spirit, one could not even confess that Jesus is Lord (I Cor. 12:3). All of these facts point to the idea that to receive the Holy Spirit is to be in fellowship with the Spirit through divine instructions (the Holy Spirit’s prescribed work; cf. Jn. 16:14). How then did the Galatians receive the Holy Spirit and thereby justification of sins? The Galatians did so by the “*hearing of faith*” (i.e., the gospel message) as opposed to trying to keep any law perfectly. Clearly they had been “*bewitched.*”

Application for Today

When one today preaches that once we have been saved we are always saved, that we have unity in our diversity of doctrinal beliefs, Catholicism, Mormonism, Islam or any other teaching contrary to the one true doctrine of Christ, we must reject it. The Christian today must understand that justification cannot be obtained through any teachings other than that of Christ. Paul told Timothy to guard this one faith that men would not pervert it and draw others away from the faith (I Tim. 6:20). When the Christian answers the Galatians 3:2 question correctly, i.e., by the “*hearing of faith*,” we will certainly reject all other teachings.