

Q. I thought we received the Holy Spirit by grace. Why, then, does Acts 5:32 say that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him?

A. The answer to this seeming contradiction between the grace taught throughout the New Testament and Acts 5:32 lies in the tenses of the verbs in this verse and the meaning of the Greek word translated "obey."

The *Apostolic Bible Polyglot* translates this verse: "And we are his witnesses of these things; but also the holy spirit, which God gave to the ones yielding obedience to him." Notice that "God gave" is in the past tense (the Greek is in the aorist tense, which is usually rendered in English as simple past tense). "Yielding obedience" is in the present tense, and "yield" has the -ing ending of a participle. This verse does not say, "...the holy spirit, which God gave to the ones who yielded obedience to him," as if yielding obedience was a work God required prior to giving the Holy Spirit. The verse speaks of God's giving the Holy Spirit prior to the people yielding obedience.

Now, we should ask, What does "yielding obedience" mean? The Greek word translated "yielding obedience" is *peitharcheō*. It is a compound of the words *peithō* and *archō*. First, let's look at *peithō*. *Peithō* means to "convince" or "persuade," or to "yield" or "trust." So, it can be used of the one convincing or of the one being convinced. In this verse, it is being used in the latter sense. It carries the idea of yielding because of being convinced or because of trusting. In other words, it is the state of being persuadable and not hard-hearted, because you trust the one with the message. This is not mindless obedience because of fear of punishment or to obtain reward.

There are many verses that show the meaning of *peithō*. I will cite only a very few to give you the idea of the meaning. Acts 17:3-4 says that Paul, in Thessalonica, was reasoning from the Scriptures, "explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.' Some of them were persuaded, and joined Paul and

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Silas, of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and not a few of the chief women." Notice that the people didn't mindlessly obey. They were persuaded by Paul's reasoning from the Scriptures. In Matthew 27:20, we read, "Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes to ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus." Here, the Jewish leaders persuaded the people. Just a few verses later, verse 43 tells us that, when Jesus was hanging on the Cross, the people mocked Him by saying, "He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now, if he wants him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matthew 27:43). The word "trusts" is from *peithō*, showing that *peithō* implies placing confidence in someone. To be persuaded by is to be convinced by the reasoning of someone to the point of relying on and trusting in the one persuading.

Archō means to "rule" or "lead." The compound *peitharcheō*, then, means to be persuaded by a ruler or leader. In Acts 5:29, Peter and the apostles answered the Jewish leaders, "We must obey God rather than men." The word "obey" here is from *peitharcheō*. While it is certainly true that we ought to obey God, we can have a better understanding of what Peter is saying when we understand that *peitharcheō* in the Bible involves the idea of yielding to a ruler because we are persuaded. In Titus 3:1, Paul tells Titus to remind the brethren to yield to worldly rulers, not because rulers are to be trusted, but because the brethren are persuaded by God who is over the rulers (see Romans 13:1-7). In Acts 27:21, Paul, even though not a ship's officer nor a Roman officer but with circumstances clearly supporting his case, daringly tells the crew of the doomed vessel, "Sirs, you should have listened to me [been persuaded by me as a leader], and not have set sail from Crete, and have gotten this injury and loss."

So, in Acts 5:29, Peter is saying that, when there is a conflict, we ought to be persuaded by what God tells us as ruler rather than by what men tell us as rulers. Just two verses later, we come to Acts 5:32, the verse that our question centers on. I think it will help us understand if we look at the context beginning with the question the high priest and council asked Peter:

"Didn't we strictly command you not to teach in this name? Behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood on us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you killed, hanging him on a tree. God exalted him with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins. We are His witnesses of these

things; and so also is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Acts 5:28-32

With this understanding of *peitharcheō* and the tenses Peter used, we can now see that Peter was responding to the high priest's assertion of his authority by saying:

- We must be persuaded by what God as ruler tells us rather than by what you as ruler tell us.
- You killed Jesus, but God raised Him up (this is the grounds for our being persuaded by God rather than by you).
- God exalted Jesus to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins.
- We are witnesses of these things (a further reason to be persuaded by Him).
- The Holy Spirit is a witness of these things.
- God gave the Holy Spirit to those who are persuaded by Him as ruler.

Peter told the chief priest and the council that he and the apostles would be persuaded by God as ruler rather than by the chief priest and council. The apostles based this choice on the fact that the chief priest and council killed Jesus but God raised Him up. Moreover, God gave the Holy Spirit to those who are persuaded by Him rather than to the chief priest and council—implying that the chief priest and council are not persuaded by God. There was no question about who the apostles would yield to. The evidence and the Holy Spirit had convinced them to be persuaded by God. The Jewish rulers' worldly authority could not trump God's if there was a conflict. There could be no debate over who was being led by the Holy Spirit. The apostles, by yielding to God, showed that God had given them the Holy Spirit. He had not given the Spirit to the chief priest and the council. No wonder that the next verse tells us, "But they, when they heard this, were cut to the heart, and determined to kill them" (Acts 5:33).

In summary, Acts 5:32 does not say, as some English translations make it seem, that God will give the Holy Spirit to those who obey. It says that God *gave* the Holy Spirit to those who *are* persuaded by Him as ruler. He gave them the Holy Spirit first. That is why they have the mind to be persuaded by God.

But as it is written, "Things which an eye didn't see, and an ear didn't hear, which didn't enter into the heart of

man, these God has prepared for those who love him." But to us, God revealed them through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For who among men knows the things of a man, except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so, no one knows the things of God, except God's Spirit. But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might know the things that were freely given to us by God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual things. Now the natural man doesn't receive the things of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to him, and he can't know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual discerns all things, and he himself is judged by no one. "For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct him?" But we have Christ's mind.

1 Corinthians 2:9-16

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