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ACTS 5:32 EXPLAINED

A question that has come up is: Does God give us His Spirit BECAUSE we obey Him; or does God give us His Spirit so that THEN we can obey Him?

Let's examine Acts 5:32 more closely.

THE GREEK TEXTS

The Received Text, the Byzantine Text and the Alexandrian Text for this verse are all agreed, except that the Alexandrian Text leaves out two words. Since the RSV and the NIV use this Alexandrian Text as their base, these two omissions are reflected in those translations.

The two words left out in the Alexandrian text are:

1) "Autou" (his) before "martures"(witnesses).

2) "De" (also) with the expression "to pneuma to hagion" (the Holy Spirit).

So where the KJV reads:

> And we are HIS witnesses of these things; and [so is] ALSO the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. (Acts 5:32)

The NIV reads:

> We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." (Acts 5:32 NIV)

And the New RSV translation of 1989 reads:

> And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him." (Acts 5:32 NRSV)

As can be seen, the omission of these two Greek words is reflected in both of these translations.

While it doesn't have a major impact in THIS particular case, "dropped words" are very common in the Alexandrian Text and reflect the general sloppiness of that particular textbase.

But apart from these two dropped words, all the Greek Texts agree fully on this verse. So let's examine the text more closely:

Transliterated into our alphabet this verse reads:

kai hemeis esmen autou martures ton rhematon touton kai to pneuma de to hagion ho edoken ho theos tois peitharchousin auto (Acts 5:32)

The expression "ho edoken ho theos" ("which God has given") employs the aorist tense with the active voice and the indicative mood of the verb "didomi", which means "to give".

This expression "which God has given" is in the aorist tense. It could equally correctly be translated into English as "which God gives", using the present tense in English (as in other Scriptures like Matthew 3:17, etc., where the Greek aorist tense is translated into the present tense in English). It could also be rendered as "which God shall give", using the future tense in English (as in Scriptures like 1 Cor. 16:12, etc., where the Greek aorist tense is translated into the future tense in English).

By using the aorist tense, Peter was not emphasising the timing when God gives His Spirit, but rather that the details he was stating were precise and correct. It is a timeless statement!

In plain English:

The use of the aorist tense in Acts 5:32 means that it is perfectly correct to translate this verse into English in the following three ways:

1) "... the Holy Spirit which God HAS GIVEN to them that obey Him."

2) "... the Holy Spirit which God GIVES (or IS GIVING) to them that obey Him."

3) "... the Holy Spirit which God SHALL GIVE to them that obey Him."

By using the aorist tense Peter was focussing on WHAT God does, and NOT on WHEN God will do this.

Peter made his statement in the aorist tense because it is true that God had in the past given His Spirit to those who obeyed Him; He in the present gives His Spirit to those who obey Him; and in the future He will give His Spirit to those who will obey Him. It is a timeless truth.

The last expression in the Greek text in that verse is "tois peitharchousin auto", literally meaning "to those obeying Him", employing the participle in the active voice of the present tense. The point to notice is that here Peter used the present tense. By using the present tense in this expression Peter means: those who obey God RIGHT NOW, present tense!

Next, the Greek word "tois" is the dative case of the plural and therefore it specifically means "TO THOSE" or "TO THEM"! The word "peitharchousin" is the participle mood and therefore literally means "OBEYING"; a "participle" being a word that has the characteristics of both, a verb and an adjective, and it has the capacity to take an object. And in this verse it certainly has an object, the word "auto". This word "auto" is the dative case of the singular pronoun "he" and it therefore literally means "TO HIM"!

When we put this all together, it becomes quite clear that Peter is emphasising that God gives (or has given or shall give) His Spirit ... "TO THOSE OBEYING TO HIM", right now, present tense! Peter is NOT talking about God giving His Spirit to ENABLE us to obey God in the future, otherwise Peter would have had to use the future tense for the verb "obey".

<u>THE CONTEXT OF THIS VERSE</u>

Peter and the apostles were standing before the national council, made up of religious leaders (verse 27). When confronted with the charge that they should not be preaching Christ's message to the people,

Peter answered ...

> Then Peter and the [other] apostles answered and said, WE OUGHT TO OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN. (Acts 5:29)

The context of this verse is very specifically OBEDIENCE TO GOD! That is the issue Peter raises. Peter then gives a very brief statement pointing out that through repentance we gain access to forgiveness of sins (which is by grace, undeserved).

Then in verse 32 he makes the statement we have been examining. He and the other apostles were eye-witnesses of the events surrounding Christ's ministry, death and resurrection. Another source of witnessing the truth of Christ's message is the Holy Spirit, which God gives to all those who obey Him. And that is also what he had said in Acts 2:38.

The religious leaders very clearly understood that Peter was saying that THEY did not have the Holy Spirit BECAUSE they did not obey God! And this made them so angry that they wanted to kill the apostles ...

> When they heard [that], they were cut [to the heart], and TOOK COUNSEL TO SLAY THEM. (Acts 5:33)

They were furious! They understood from Peter's use of the present tense that Peter said that THEY WERE NOT OBEYING GOD at that specific point in time.

In summary, both, the grammatical construction of the verse itself and also the context in which this verse appears, make clear that Peter was explaining a causal relationship:

> If you want to receive God's Spirit, you have to start obeying God. If you don't obey God, then you also will not receive God's Spirit. If you already have God's Spirit dwelling within you and you stop obeying God, then God's Spirit will leave you.

That's the message of Acts 5:32. Clearly God gives us His Spirit BECAUSE we obey Him.

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