

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 385
Series: The Primal Church - Acts Chapters 1-8
Verses: Acts 8:14-17
Topic: Receiving The Holy Spirit
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Acts 8:14-17 MKJV And the apostles in Jerusalem hearing that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent Peter and John to them; (15) who when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. (16) For as yet He had not fallen on any of them, they were baptized only in the name of the Lord Jesus. (17) Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

This is a very contentious passage and evangelicals and charismatics have very different interpretations of it. Let us try to sort out what is meant here.

1. First the Samaritans believed and were baptized in the name of Jesus.
2. Then the apostles came down and laid hands on them so they received the Holy Spirit.
3. This reception of the Holy Spirit was visible to an external observer (so that later on Simon could see that it was occurring and offer them money for that power).

What is this passage saying about the work of the Holy Spirit? Firstly we have to make a distinction between His work “within” people and His work “upon” people.

Within: When the Bible says the Spirit works ‘within’ someone it generally refers to some inner wisdom skill, creativity, or aspect of character formation. This includes quiet and invisible fruits of the Spirit, wisdom, sanctification, creativity and character formation – and bible characters such as Joseph, Daniel, and Bezalel. Key verses; Ephesians 5:18-20, Exodus 31:1-5, Ezekiel 36;26,27

Upon: When the Bible talks about the Spirit “coming upon” someone it is often an act of powerful inspiration, bold action or prophecy e.g., Samson fighting the Philistines. The Spirit upon someone results in the outward and visible gifts of the Spirit, mighty works of power, witness, boldness. Bible characters include the elders of Israel, Samson, and the prophets. Includes events such as Pentecost. Key Bible verses: Acts 1:8, Numbers 11;25-29, Judges 14:6,19.

The quiet invisible work of the Holy Spirit within the lives of the Samaritans started at conversion and produced faith, repentance from magic and idols and “great joy in

that city” Acts 8:8 even prior to the arrival of the apostles from Jerusalem.

The outward visible baptism in the Holy Spirit, with the Spirit coming upon them in power, was delayed until the arrival of the apostles. This was something you could see and Simon Magus witnessed it and offered money for it (Acts 8;18).

The separation of the “within” and “upon” elements is not the ideal, but it happens. For instance Samson had great power from the Lord “upon” him, but very little evidence of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit “within” him. Some televangelists seem to be following this pattern of outward power and inward bankruptcy. On the other hand Bezalel, Joseph and Daniel had great inner wisdom from God but no miracle working power. The apostolic ideal is to have both the fruits and the gifts, both the work of the Holy Spirit “within”, and the Holy Spirit “upon”.

Of course the more important of the two is the work of sanctification, without which no-one can see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). In Matthew 7;21-23 those corrupt miracle workers who say “Lord, Lord” but work wickedness are cast into the outer darkness.

Yet we still need all we can get of the Holy Spirit. We need His work within us and we need His work upon us. We need the infilling (Ephesians 5;19) and we need the baptism (Acts 1:8). The effect of the infilling is grace, the effect of the baptism is power to witness and to tell of the glories of God.

A Christian who is well-disciplined and holy probably has the infilling but may need the baptism. On the other hand a Christian who is powerful in witness and works probably has the baptism, but may need more of the daily infilling.

If you lack power you need the baptism. If you lack wisdom or if you lack the ability to resist temptation then you need the daily infilling.

To get the daily infilling just pray each morning, confessing your sin, your need of wisdom and your desire to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

To get the baptism, seek God in prayer and ask Him to lead you to an anointed leader who can lay hands upon you. Spiritual gifts are nearly always received through the laying on of hands (as we saw in an earlier one of these studies).

Lets not break into theological camps centered on one or the other of these experiences. Lets take hold of both of these great and wonderful works of the Holy Spirit and seek ‘more of both’.

I have been both a Baptist and a Pentecostal, and each of these denominations has tended to grab hold of one work of the Spirit, and let go of the other. Now I am what some call Bapticostal! I believe in BOTH the fruits and the gifts, in wisdom and character and in power and in healing – I want the whole lot!

There is only one Holy Spirit but He relates to us in many different ways. Now I only have one wife but she relates to me in different ways as husband, lover, friend and even as “the boss’ in our ministry. If I say “I only want you to relate to me as

“husband” then I lose some of the richness of the relationship.

The Samaritans knew the saving work of Jesus and the inner joy of the Spirit but they needed “something more”, which was supplied by the laying on of the hands of the apostles and receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Let us follow the example and wisdom of the early Christians and move into all that God has for us!

Blessings,

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