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Is Empowered and Enlivened By The Spirit of Christ Acts Chapter 2

Let us continue our study of the Book of Acts and clarify a lot of these things that are oftentimes confused and perhaps distorted. I received a note from someone who was having a Bible study in another city and wanted help. They were trying to get their equilibrium as far as the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. They started asking me certain questions, and I could tell that there were issues. I started texting as fast as I could, and it was amazing. It is amazing how much you can actually put on a phone in a day. We were able to talk through it, and it just reminded me that the Holy Spirit is so misunderstood. And I think one of the reasons is because the Holy Spirit is often referred to as a force, and therefore, is often declared to be an “it”. I keep reminding people He's not an “it”. He's a person. Ephesians Chapter Four Verse Thirty says,
(Ephesians 4:30) “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit...”

You cannot grieve an “it”. The qualities of the Holy Spirit are clearly the qualities of a person. It is the Person of the Spirit of Jesus Christ that we see within Him. If you recall, Jesus says,

(John 14:26) “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name,…”

So how powerful it is that we have this Person, the Holy Spirit, living within us? I've often pondered what makes the Holy Spirit different from the Spirit of God. Did you ever question that? We know that there seems to be a clear distinction as we go throughout Scripture. The Holy Spirit seems to be **distinguished** in the sense that the Holy Spirit represents the Spirit of Christ [as the Trinity is 3 in 1]. We also understand that the Spirit of Christ, therefore, is represented as the Gospel of John says of Christ,

(John 1:14) “...full of grace and truth.”

He is the Spirit of grace and truth that lives within us. You read in the Old Testament, for instance, that Samson was filled with the Spirit of God. But do not you think it is

interesting when you read that in the book of Judges; it does not say that Samson was filled with the Holy Spirit. It says that he was filled with the Spirit of God. And what happens when he was filled with the Spirit of God? How did God fill Samson? What we understand is that Samson became very powerful, very strong. But Samson was not gracious. Nor was he sincere or genuine. Therefore, his relationships were not better, indicating that we do not see the Spirit of Christ within Samson. What we see is the Spirit of power. God has a great power that He interjected even in Saul. As you read in the Old Testament, there are a number of passages in I Samuel where the Spirit of God comes upon Saul. That is impressive! At one point, he defeats an entire army. But clearly his heart was not changed, nor was his heart right. And you see Saul dancing around naked with the Spirit of power or a Spirit of wisdom. Even with Solomon you see evidence of the Spirit Who comes from God. But what is very distinct in the Holy Spirit is that He brings the nature of Jesus Christ within us. We are not going around trying to combat

nations with great strength and great power like Samson. What we are doing is walking in the love and the heart of Jesus Christ. One of the clearest pictures of this is in the Gospel of John. Jesus gives a precursor of the Spirit of God coming on the day of Pentecost.

And if you look with me in John Chapter 20, this is after the Christ had been resurrected. We will start with Verse 19. It is the first day of the week. That is strange, isn't?

(John 20:19) “So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, (once again, the reason why we meet on Sunday and not Sabbath), and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’”

(John 20:20) “And when he had said this, he showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples therefore rejoiced when they saw the Lord.”

(John 20:21) “Jesus therefore said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’”

Watch verse 22.

(John 20:22) “And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

Where does the Holy Spirit come from? Jesus Christ. Galatians will tell us He is the Spirit of God's Son.

(Galatians 4:6) “Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts...”

So what happens when you and I receive the Spirit of God's Son? You start looking like God's Son. You start acting like God's Son. Your desire is to do the things of God's Son. People often may comment that they see the Holy Spirit in someone because they are dancing around. But I do not think that is what Jesus would be doing. That is not Jesus. You know, if he looks like Jesus and acts like Jesus and talks like Jesus, I would agree that it is due to the Spirit of Jesus Christ. But outside of that, I would question what they say. I do not know what the problem is, but that is not Jesus. You need to understand the role of the Holy Spirit. Once again, if you were to look in the

Gospel of John toward the end of Chapter 14, Jesus will talk about the fact that He's going to send His helper, the Holy Spirit. And if you pick up in verse 25 of John 14, it reads this way,

(John 14:25) “These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you.”

(John 14:26) “But the helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”

So the role of the Holy Spirit is to proclaim what Jesus said. And if you drop a little bit further in Chapter 15 in Verse 26, the emphasis will be the same, but probably a little bit clearer in this passage. It reads this way,

(John 15:26) “When the Helper comes, Whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me.”

What is the role of the Spirit? Bear witness. Bear witness. Right. When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, who are you going to be talking about? Jesus. You are going to be

talking about Jesus. You are going to be acting like Christ. And once again, looking in Galatians, we have the Spirit of God's Son within us.

(Galatians 4:6) “Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts.”

And how does the Spirit of God's Son pray to the Father? He calls Him Dad. So if the Holy Spirit is within you, you will almost instantly have this rapport with the Father and the desire to come to Him with everything because you are no longer coming to Him out of fear and anxiety. You have the Spirit of God's Son. That is why Hebrews says :

(Hebrews 4:16) “Therefore let us come with confidence (boldly) before the throne of grace.”

Why? Because I have the Spirit of God's Son. I am accepted. There is no condemnation in Christ Jesus. Every time I come to Him, I come to Him in Jesus' name. There is great power in this; I have access to the throne; and I do not see God as a judge. I see Him as my Dad. Paul will

write the same thing in Romans. If you will look with me in Romans Chapter Eight, it reads this way.

(Romans 8:14) “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”

(Romans 8:15) “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’”

(Romans 8:16) “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our Spirit that we are children of God,”

(Romans 8:17) “and if children, heirs...”

What is clear is that, when you receive the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ is working inside Who says, “You know, I just want to do my Father's will.” This parallels with what we have read in the Book of Acts--the receiving of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost during the Feast of First Fruits. During this feast, people would bring their first fruits from their harvest. What was significant about the Feast of First Fruits above all the other feasts is that

people were coming to worship God out of gratitude. It was the distinguishing characteristic of this feast. It has the connotation of not only the first, but more specifically, the best and superior. You have to ask yourself, “What makes it best?” We are offering fruit to God. What makes this fruit the best gift to God? And the bottom line is the heart. That is what makes it best. What makes it first fruits? If you were to give a gift to God, would you pick up just anything, polish it, and then tell God that it is the best you can do? God would say, “How do you feel about putting it together?” You answer, “Not bad. I did not have any time to do anything else.” You know? We squeeze it in from here and there. God says, “Then we cannot call that first fruits.” You respond, “But it is really good.” He says, “I love a cheerful giver.” He accepts it because it is the heart that makes it first fruits. There is an interesting point in James Chapter One. James starts off,

(James 1:2) “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,”

James says that you should actually be joyful when you are encountering trials if you are a child of God. Why? Because God is working on you. He's doing something good. Every good and perfect gift comes from above. Right? We believe that. If you believe that, you are first fruits. What makes this gift unique is that we rejoice and give the gift of praise to God. We do not give God praise because of our circumstances. We give God praise because we believe He is good. There is a higher realm. Anybody can be happy if he wins the lottery. He would be jumping up and down and excited about it. But we actually rejoice when we encounter various trials because we know that God is doing good. Our faith is in His goodness even if we cannot see it. And this is an acceptable gift to God. This is what makes our praise unique. The Old Testament saints could not do this. It is the evidence of the Spirit of God within us when we can rejoice in difficulties. That is what makes us very unique. James will write this in

(James 1:18) “In the exercise of His will, He brought us forth by the Word of truth so that we might be as it were the first fruits of His creation.”

We are the embodiment of that Pentecost, for we begin to proclaim the greatness of God, not based any more on our circumstances, but based on the Spirit of God. Ours is an internal praise. It is coming from the Spirit of God. It does not matter what is going on in our lives. We are giving thanks. As Christ is heading to the cross, Scripture says,

(I Corinthians 11:23) “...that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed, took bread;”

(I Corinthians 11:24) “and when He had given thanks...”

Now how in the world could you do such a thing? That is evidence of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And that same Spirit, when you receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, dwells within you. This is why you and I can rejoice and consider it all joy when we encounter various trials. We have that first fruit. This is basically what He's saying in Hebrews. If

you look in Hebrews Chapter 12, the mountain that we go to is not the same mountain that Moses ascended. As you read verses 18 through 27, wow. I mean, wow. This is a grand mountain we approach. But He is also conveying that our worship is very different. He states this in verse 28.

(Hebrews 12:28) “Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe,”

(Hebrews 12:29) “for our God is a consuming fire.”

The point of the matter is that our gift to Him is the greatest gift. The greatest once again, is the wave offering. Wave offering. You are waving it before God and saying, “This is the best I have.” He replies, “What is the best you have?” You answer, “The best I have is I trust You no matter what.” He goes, “That is what I was looking for.” And we would literally start waving what is called the first fruits. See? That is what is happening at Pentecost. The Spirit of God is coming upon them. The fulfillment of the

first fruits is actually coming to fruition on that day because the Spirit of God is coming upon them. What you will see throughout the Book of Acts is a metamorphosis that takes us out of the realm of the Old Testament in which people had to have things going their way in order to be happy and puts us in the realm of Paul's singing praises in the prison. He goes, "Whoa. I am so glad I am in prison." What is the second verse, Paul? "I am so glad that I was beaten today." What is the third verse? "Hopefully, I will be beheaded." With Paul, there wasn't a downside. You kill him, he goes home. You beat him, he gets bonus points. Peter will say,

(I Peter 3:14) "If you are reviled (suffer) for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."

You go, wow. That is wild. You are never closer to God than when you are suffering for doing what is right! What a wonderful benefit that is. If things are going fine, that is great. But it does not matter what happens because it is all good. God is doing great things in your life, and you

believe this. This is not human nature. This has to be something divine Who is in me? That is the Spirit of God. You have been changed. There are events that come upon us all when it is easy to get overwhelmed from a human standpoint. Have you ever gone through something that, on an average day, in an average life of an average person, would be totally depressing? However, now that you have received Jesus Christ, you find yourself rejoicing. It is just the greatest day. It is like the disciples after they were beaten. They start praising God, as we see in

(Acts 5:41) “So they went on their way from the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.”

You have to ask, “Are you possessed?” Their answer, of course, is, “Yes! We are possessed by the Spirit of God.” How powerful is the Spirit of God within us! This is the grand transition that is happening. This is what makes the church the church. This is what makes us different from those in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament people were not united by the bond of the Spirit of Christ. They

were united by the bond of the law. They were united by the bond of their heritage, but they were not united by the Holy Spirit. This is what makes the church. God will actually call this the body of Christ in which He breathes at Pentecost. He breathes His life into them. The parallel between the Old and New Testaments is found in the first two chapters of Acts which compares with the first two chapters of Genesis. In Genesis, what is God doing? Everything on Earth is lifeless, so God breathes on it. His Spirit goes across the water, and it teems with life. Then there is Adam who is just a clay figure. God molded him. What does He do? He breathes on Adam, and Adam becomes a living being. Contrast this with what happens in Acts. This is Pentecost. There are one hundred and twenty people sitting in an upper room. They are just clay. But the Holy Spirit comes upon them, and the church becomes alive. We begin to see this living thing. The church is not an organization. It is an organism. That is why it is called the body of Christ. It becomes a living,

breathing thing, this church. This is what the Book of Acts is explaining to us.

Let me just say this--you do not want to take the Book of Acts and start building doctrine out of it. What I mean by that is that you do not want to create doctrine according to the way things are done in the Book of Acts. Here is why. Go back to Genesis and think about how things were created. Things are created basically in six days. On the seventh day, God rests. Now let me ask you something. Were the days of creation ever repeated? No. That was the beginning, was it not? The Spirit is breathed into Adam. Does God breathe into every human being in Genesis? We know the breath of God is what enlivens people, but that is not how they begin their lives. Adam has a wife. How did he get his wife? That is quite unique. Beyond that, they are told to procreate. The same thing is true in Acts. It is the beginning of things, and you are going to see a number of very unique things happening. One of the things the people did in the Book of Acts was to sell their property and then had everything in common.

You literally have a commune to begin with in the Book of Acts. Is God giving us doctrine on how to live? No. How do we know that? Look at Timothy and Titus where God gives you a doctrine on how the church is to function. It does not direct you to sell all your property and make it all common. But the point is that life was so vital. Life was so great. The Spirit of God was so alive that people were just beginning to grow. You look at a newborn, and the baby's arms are moving. The baby is not communicating. You do not want to decide to be like that baby when you grow up. I do not want to be like the baby. The baby is just exhilarated. It is exploring life, and it is a wonderful time. It is a wonderful birth, but the church is now beginning to come alive. The power of the Spirit is so strong that a married couple will literally drop dead because they lied to the Holy Spirit within the text. It is not happening every day. Today, however, people are lying against the Holy Spirit often. Let's look at Korah's rebellion in the Old Testament. Korah starts arguing against Moses, and he says, "Who are you to be head honcho?" God says to

Moses, “Okay. Call him out.” So Moses calls him out. God then says, “Now, I will choose the one I want to lead these people. As to the ones that are not mine, the earth is going to open up and swallow them all alive.” You say, “Wow. That is pretty drastic.” And God says, “Yes.” What you need to understand are all the signs and miracles that these people experienced. It goes back to the fundamental principle found in

(Luke 12:48) “...From everyone who has been given much, much will be required;”

Let me interject an interesting note at this juncture. I know a lot of times people say that they want more signs. Are you sure? You are going to be held accountable for those. The more you have, the more you are accountable for. I am not saying do not ask to grow. I am just saying that it is better to let God do it in His timing . Let Him move in your life. Yes, you will be hungry. But often, you just become more accountable for things you are not prepared to handle. So in Acts, you are going to see very unique things happening from the very start. You will see

that the commune living style begins to wane. Their way of life will begin to stabilize in the epistles. As the churches are established, the doctrine of the church begins to formulate. Of course, there are fundamental principles. For instance, the Holy Spirit is the church's power source. It is a fundamental principle. We believe that He is the Spirit of Christ. Pastor Greg and I were talking earlier today about other churches as well as our own. You do not want to hire people because they have a degree in church ministries. You want a person in a position of leadership because he or she has the Spirit of Christ within them. A good example of this is in Acts Chapter Six where they were looking for men to literally wait on the tables. If this were today, would we be looking for someone with a degree in waiting on tables? No. So where are your credentials? Do you have any experience in this? Have you read books about it? In Acts Chapter Six, this is not the issue. The issue is whether this person or these people are full of the Holy Spirit. Right? That is what we are looking for.

(Acts 6:3) “Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.”

That is a strange method. Too often churches hire people for the pastorate simply because they have a degree. That is ridiculous. Did you check on his reputation? Does anybody know where this guy came from? Could it be possible that he is a psychopath?

(Acts 6:3) “Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.”

(Acts 6:4) “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.”

(Acts 6:5) “The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit...”

Now, let me stop here. What does someone filled with the Holy Spirit look like? I can tell you what it looks like. It is a person who is in love with God. It is a person who is in

love with doing the will of His Father. It is a person who loves the children of God. You can see this in people's hearts. It does not take long to be able to tell if a person loves God's Word or if he does not. I can pick him off a mile away. I can see that his heart beams. It just does. You cannot hide it. Neither can you fabricate it. I have seen people who say they love the Word of God. But it just does not look like it. You can tell, for instance, when a couple loves each other. Right? "Oh, we love being together." Really? Yeah. Does not look like you love being together. "Oh, we do. We do." Yet these people are rigid when together. I am not seeing the love there. The same thing is true with your relationship with God. What are we looking for? We are looking for men who are full of the Spirit of Christ. Pastor Josh from time to time comes up to me. "I am learning, pastor. I am learning." I reply, "Josh, you have nothing to worry about. The reason that you were brought on as a pastor was your heart. That is the only reason you were brought on." And I also said, "I am not worried about education, and I am not worried about

all that stuff. That is going to come because your hunger is there.” And I know very few people that have learned Scripture as fast as Josh. I have known a lot of Bible and seminary students who cannot quote nearly as much as he can. It is a little frustrating because I will be up here preaching. I look in his direction and see that he is mouthing what I am about to say. What is that? Well, that has to be a love for God's Word that really trumps everything. Josh sometimes may be a little overly aggressive, but I would rather have a little over aggression than apathy. He epitomizes the zeal of a man that loves God. I am just so thankful for him. How rare it is to find somebody that just really loves God. So many times I see people go off to seminary and lose their love. It is a very sad thing to watch it happen. They become puffed up with knowledge. Before long they are talking about things that really make absolutely no difference. It is just the wisdom of man, and it ruins them. It ruins them. We were talking about Fuller Theological Seminary, which I will say nothing about except to advise people to not go to Fuller

Theological Seminary. It is the Spirit of Christ that will change the heart and make the difference. So that is what the Book of Acts is doing, and you begin to see the breathing of the Spirit of God. Peter will stand up in Acts Chapter Two and begin to proclaim the message. There has been a change in Peter's heart. This is a magnificent change because this is the same guy that, fifty days earlier, was hiding from the little girls. And now Peter is standing up. He knows he could die. But he is standing up and says,

(Acts 2:23) “...this Man...you nailed him to the cross...and put Him to death.”

Peter is indicting them. That is pretty bold when you consider it. He begins to proclaim this great message. He starts by proclaiming Jesus out of Joel. He quotes Scripture from the Old Testament. Who is causing him to think these things? The Spirit of God. He is welling up inside of Peter. He quotes a Psalm. He talks about David. He talks about Jesus. Jesus is the One. He is the Messiah. Can you imagine how these people felt? This guy is about

as bold as you can get at this juncture because the Spirit of God is just breathing through him. The Spirit of God is not afraid of anybody. The people respond,

(Acts 2:37) “Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’”

I can imagine that was probably pretty strange to them. Where does this conviction come from? The Spirit of God. He is moving. He is breathing through them. Powerful.

(Acts 2:38) “Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

Now I told you that you do not want to take an early action and make a fundamental doctrine of how the church should be performing but a question was asked of me regarding baptism. I want to follow through on this because there seems to be a lot of confusion about baptism. There is a lot of debate about it as well as the

Holy Spirit. Let us kill two birds with one stone. What you first see in the passage is that Peter is calling upon them to repent. You see that? Read verse 38.

(Acts 2:38) “Peter said to them, ‘Repent...’”

Now we know what that is about. God is calling them to think differently. In order to repent, you have to think differently. You cannot come to God thinking on your terms. We must come on God's terms--whatever God says. Peter then continues,

(Acts 2:38) “...and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

What does baptism stand for? An initial part of it has to do with water. Specifically, it is about cleansing. All the way back in the Old Testament, the priests would wash themselves before they would go into the Holy of Holies. Baptism is a cleansing. Also, it is an outward manifestation of what should be taking place with the inside. The priests knew that just cleaning their skin did not make them holy

before the Lord. Yet, no part was to be dirty at all. So besides cleansing their skin, they would offer sacrifices that they might be acceptable before God. The point of baptism is a testimony of the cleansing that will take place. The text goes on to say

(Acts 2:38) “...in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”

We now have 2 aspects, washing and bearing testimony. The question you want to ask yourself is whether it is the baptism that is saving me or something else. Up to this point, it almost looks like it is the baptism. Hold onto that thought because we are going to change your mind. But let's just review what it says. It says,

(Acts 2:28) “that your sins may be forgiven.”

It seems like you need to be baptized, and then you will receive the Holy Spirit. Another way to put it is that you must be baptized first in order to receive the Holy Spirit. Is that the way you are reading it? 1. Repent. 2. Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your

sins. 3. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then Verse 41 describes what happened.

(Acts 2:41) “So then those who had received his word were baptized...”

It is the word that brought the transformation about in their hearts. Those who had received his word were baptized. Therefore, the baptism was actually a manifestation or an obedience to the Word. That is to say that it was the Word that brought the conviction. It was the Word [of God] that did the cleansing. It is the baptism that is the illustration of that obedience. Baptism is an act of obedience, is not it? And what must have happened in order for me to want to be baptized? I mean, who wants to be baptized? It looks stupid. Who wants to do that? It does not make any sense, and yet there is something inside of you that tells you that you need to be baptized. I have had people come up to me and say, “I need to be baptized.” And I go, okay. But I am listening for more. Just like Peter was listening for something. You need to confess to be all in. If you sit back and say, “I have decided to

follow Jesus, but I am not going to tell anybody.” You are not all in. But if you say, “I have decided to follow Jesus; I am going to be baptized. Then that is a step that is proclaiming this.

(Acts 2:41) “So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.”

(Acts 2:42) “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to breaking of bread and prayer.”

The evidence of the Spirit of God began to unite this body, and it was like they couldn't leave each other. They did not want to go home. And it says in Verse 43,

(Acts 2:43) “Everyone kept feeling their sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.”

(Acts 2:44) “And all those who believed were together and had all things in common.”

(Acts 2:45) “and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anybody might have need.”

(Acts 2:46) “Day by day, continuing with one mind in the temple and breaking bread, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,”

(Acts 2:47) “praising God and having favor with all the people...”

They could not leave. The Spirit of God was so powerful in them. What a magnificent birth that we witnessed. As you go on, I am going to give you several examples of this. We are going to look at another example of baptism. Look with me in Chapter Eight. We come into the Samaritan region as the believers begin to be scattered, sharing the Gospel as they go. It says that Saul has been persecuting the church. It is after the testimony of Stephen in Chapter Eight. And if you look with me in Verse Nine,

(Acts 8:9) “Now there was a certain man named Simon who formerly was practicing magic in the city, astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great;”

(Acts 8:10) “and they all from the smallest to the greatest were giving attention to him, saying, ‘This man is what is called the Great Power of God.’”

(Acts 8:11) “And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts.”

Up to this point, it seems like he was the star of the show.

(Acts 8:12) “But when they believed Philip preaching about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.”

Simon’s audience dwindled. Once again, we are starting to get a common denominator. What is the common denominator? The Word of God. Specifically, the Good News, the Gospel. So, when Philip was preaching the Good News about the kingdom of God and the name of

Jesus Christ, they were being baptized. The people heard the Word of God.

(Acts 8:13) “Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philiip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.”

(Acts 8:14) “Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent them Peter and John.”

I want to stop here just a second. When did they receive the Holy Spirit in Acts Chapter Two? Do you remember what they did in order to receive the Holy Spirit? He says, “Repent, be baptized, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Do you remember anybody laying hands on anybody? Yet they are in this text. So they sent Peter and John to Samaria. Resuming with Verse 15,

(Acts 8:15) “who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.”

These people had believed and were baptized, yet they still had not received the Holy Spirit. That is strange, isn't it? So Peter and John came down to pray with them.

(Acts 8:16) “For He (that is the Holy Spirit) had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Interesting phrase, “simply been baptized.” Why would you say, “simply been baptized”? I thought it was a requisite to be baptized “in the name of the Lord Jesus”.

(Acts 8:17) “Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.”

(Acts 8:18) “Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed on the laying on of the apostles' hands, he began offering them money,”

(Acts 8:19) “saying, ‘Give me this authority as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’”

(Acts 8:20) “But Peter said to him, ‘May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!’”

(Acts 8:22) “Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.”

(Acts 8:23) “For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.”

(Acts 8:24) “But Simon answered and said, ‘Pray to the Lord for me yourselves so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.’”

The point is that Simon believes he is baptized, but he has not received the Spirit of God. Scripture is telling us that there is a kind of faith that is not a saving faith. It is like what James says, You say you have this faith, but can that faith save you? (James Chapter 2)

You can be convinced that Jesus is Who He says He is. By the way, the word “convinced” could actually be exchanged for “believe”. You could be convinced or could

even have a conviction. This guy is Who He says He is. When we say we receive Jesus, what we are saying is we are receiving Who He is, and we want Who He is to be who we are. But Simon had not reached that point yet because Simon was still in this whole realm of making money. But what is interesting as well is that God purposely held off the giving of the Holy Spirit until Peter and John came. Why would He do that? I am going to tell you why. Once again, the Book of Acts is the beginning of the church. God is establishing the authority of the church through Peter and John, and He is establishing the foundation to be the Word of God. What we know according to the Scripture in Hebrews Chapter Two (Verse 4) in particular, is that God gave these apostles signs and wonders and miracles so that they would oversee literally the writing of the New Testament. They would have to come across as authoritative; plus, they were establishing, as it were, the foundation of the church. Ephesians will tell us

(Ephesians 2:20) “having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone.”

He talks about the foundation. The foundation is being established. In order for them to have credibility, these people needed to understand that the Holy Spirit was given to them to give to others so that the source might be the ones who had been with Christ, not Simon, a magician who bought it and is selling it. Only men who were really changed had and could then give the Holy Spirit. This is why it is so important that you understand that God has given the church authority to proclaim the message and to oversee the integrity of Scripture. He is establishing the foundation of the importance of the church. We will not continue to see the laying on of hands. But why does he do it here? Because we are going from Judea into Samaria, into an entirely different realm. We are going to the Samaritans. The Samaritans have to understand that this is the God of the Jews, Jesus Christ,

and that authority is coming from Peter and John. They are establishing their authority.

You read a little bit further in Chapter Eight, Philip is talking with an Ethiopian eunuch. As Philip comes to the Ethiopian, he sees him reading Scripture.

(Acts 8:30) “Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’”

(Acts 8:31) “And he said, ‘Well, how could I unless someone guides me?’”

Philip then begins to explain to the eunuch what he is reading.

(Acts 8:35) “Then Philip opened his mouth and, beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.”

(Acts 8:36) “As they went along the road they came to some water. and the eunuch said, ‘Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?’”

This text is often perceived as having been added on to the original writings, but it was understood by the founding fathers that this is what was said.

(Acts 8:37) “And Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’”

It would seem that there is a reluctance on Philip's part to baptize this man. In other words, just being baptized with water is not enough. Reading Scripture is not enough. What must you do? Believe with all your heart. This has always been the requisite. Why was it not tested in the beginning? Because the Spirit of God was so powerful moving upon these people's hearts. There was no question. They were redeemed. The Spirit of God was bouncing off them. But now we have this man who is reading. Philip needs to be sure of his heart. Philip knows that Simon was baptized, but his heart was not right. Philip thinks that they probably should not have baptized him. You understand what I am saying? Therefore, Philip needs to know more about the eunuch's heart.

(Acts 8:37) “And Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’”

(Acts 8:38) “And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as a eunuch, and he baptized him.”

(Acts 8:39) “When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him but went on his way rejoicing.”

(Acts 8:40) “But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through, he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.”

I am going to go a little bit further into the conversion of Paul when God at first had demonstrated His Presence. His name was Saul at that time. He had been transfixed and was blinded. He had to go to Ananias, and Ananias is told by God to lay his hands on him. If you look with me in

(Acts 9:17) “Ananias departed and entered the house, after laying his hands on him said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord

Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me also that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’’

In obedience, Ananias lays his hands upon him, and he is filled with the Holy Spirit. We have seen the laying on of hands twice. We almost might feel at this juncture that this is going to be the necessary part of the process. But God says no. Why is he doing this? Once again, to establish the authority of the leaders of the church. And regarding Saul/Paul, God is anointing an apostle named Paul. Now, however, if you go into Chapter Ten, we see the beginnings of establishing the norm for the church. In Chapter 10, Peter is sent to the Gentiles. Gentiles really are not supposed to get this. The Jews, yes. Samaritans, kind of half breeds, okay, maybe. But the Gentiles? God gave this vision to Peter and in essence tells him that he needs to go to the Gentiles. This is God’s will. It is a repeat of the foundational declaration in Acts Chapter One, isn’t it?

(Acts 1:8) “...and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and Judea, Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

Paul now begins to proclaim the message to the Gentiles. In Acts Chapter Ten, we find Paul preaching to a Roman soldier named Cornelius and his household. There are a lot of people there.

(Acts 10:38) “You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit with power, and how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.”

(Acts 10:39) “We are witnesses of all the things that He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a Cross.”

(Acts 10:40) “God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He should become visible,”

Once again, what is he preaching? The gospel. Preaching the gospel. Now where is the power? The power is in the gospel. He's preaching the gospel.

(Acts 10:41) “not to all people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.”

(Acts 10:42) “And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One Who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.”

(Acts 10:43) “Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

Whose name? Jesus! How do you receive forgiveness for sins? Believe. Believe. Let's watch what happens next.

(Acts 10:44) “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.”

What is it that is moving the hearts of people? The Holy Spirit. Yeah. And using what? The gospel, the Word of God. Note that they have not even been baptized yet. But the Holy Spirit fell upon them. Nobody laid their hands on

them. The Holy Spirit fell upon those who were listening to the message.

(Acts 10:45) “All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also.”

(Acts 10:46) “For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and exalting God.”

God has given the same sign to the Gentiles as He did to the Jews to confirm that, yes, they are sealed. Beyond this, you will not hear about the laying on of hands. There will be one other incident in which John the Baptist's disciples will proclaim through tongues. But tongues will cease from that moment on in the sense of being a sign. You will not read it anymore. So fundamentally tongues were heard three times--at Pentecost, at the time of the Gentiles, and at the time of John the Baptist--all to confirm the receiving of the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, people would be asking why it did not happen to them. It happened to Jews first. But it also happened to

the Gentiles. So the Jews could not say that they were more special than the Gentiles.

(Acts 10:47) “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?”

When the Spirit fell upon them, there was a change.

Is it necessary that you be baptized in order to receive the Holy Spirit? No. They already have the Holy Spirit. Why then are they baptized? I can tell you why. Because that is what God said to do. That is just the Spirit of God. Then you are going to bear witness. You are not going to be shy about this witness. The baptism is always that manifestation from this point on of the reality of the Holy Spirit with them. In order to be baptized, what are we looking for? And the answer is the evidence of the Holy Spirit within that person. Now why is it that, for instance, we as a church might not baptize you the same day you walk down the aisle? What we are looking for is the evidence of the Spirit of God. We see one of the evidences of the Spirit in

(Acts 4:8) “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit...”

Filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God's Son. The Holy Spirit is going to proclaim God's Son. The Holy Spirit is all about proclaiming the gospel. What does it look like if you are filled with the Holy Spirit? What are you going to be doing? Proclaiming the gospel. And you are going to be doing it in a very unapologetic way because the Spirit of God is going to be so strong when you are filled. You will not worry about the timing, any offense you might cause, or what they are thinking. As the Holy Spirit is moving, you are going to offer them Jesus. So Peter begins to stand up and speak.

(Acts 3:10) “Let it be known to all of you and to all of the people in Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, Whom you crucified, Whom God raised from the dead--by this name, this man stands here before you in good health.”

Calling Him a Nazarene was a slur, by the way.

(Acts 3:11) “He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief cornerstone.”

(Acts 3:12) “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

Now watch verse 13.

(Acts 3:13) “Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.”

What did they observe in Peter? Confidence. Confidence. The manifestation of the filling of the Holy Spirit is going to make people very confident about sharing Christ with others. You will be very confident. That is the evidence of the Holy Spirit. They understood that these were uneducated men. They were untrained. Yet they began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. Let us drop on down to

(Acts 4:31) “And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.”

What did they do? What is the evidence of the Holy Spirit within you? There is no confusion here. There is confidence. Confidence. There is confidence. There is boldness. There is no shame in the gospel. That is why, when you receive the Holy Spirit, you want to be baptized. Are you sure? Aren't you a little bit embarrassed? No. You want the world to know. Baptism is the evidence of the power of the Spirit of God that is in you, and you begin to think differently. You no longer think in terms of what I want to do. You just want to please God. What has just happened? Well, you just breathe in the “want to”. You are going to start walking in the “want to” of the Spirit. Before you had to, now you want to. Do I have to do this? Now you breathe in “I want to”. Let us end with this passage in Ephesians Chapter One. Simple verse, but a good verse. You know, certain verses are very strong on

doctrine. This is a very strong doctrinal passage. You ought to have this one circled.

(Ephesians 1:13) “In Him (that is, Jesus), you also after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.”

This is exactly what happened in the church with the Gentiles. They were listening to the message. And as they were listening to the Word, the Holy Spirit fell upon them. The Jews then realized that the Gentiles are their brethren. We see the evidence of the Spirit of God within them. The church begins operating in a whole different realm from that in which followers of God had ever operated before. They now operate without a formula. It purposely takes it out of order. The reason it purposely takes it out is it tells us the important thing is that you believe in the name of Jesus and that the Spirit of God is within you. Then you obey as the Spirit of God begins to lead and direct. You will watch throughout the Book of Acts that the Spirit of God will direct the council to make

certain decisions. You will say, where is the church's manual? There is no church manual. The church is operating in the realm of the Spirit of God. They clearly have the guidelines of Scripture, but the point of the matter is that they are now moving in the realm of the heart of Christ rather than moving in the realm of the law of methods and formulas. Hopefully, we are getting an idea of the Book of Acts. Next week we will move on to Acts Chapter Three. What I am trying to do is to give you a feel for these chapters. At this juncture, I want you to feel the birth. It is completely crystal clear because in the Old Testament, you strictly did those things because the law said you do. In the New Testament, you want to do what God directs. In Galatians, Paul is going to liken this to a child who becomes a man at his Bar Mitzvah. He says when you are young, you are no different than a slave. He says that, if your father has a slave, he is going to tell the slave what to do. When you are a young child, he is going to tell you what to do. But when you become a man, you have a different Spirit about you. That is the fullness of

time. When Jesus comes into your heart, you have the Spirit which cries out, “Abba! Father!”, and you start operating in the realm of what is right, not what you have to do. Yes, it is possible that people are baptized without heaven in mind. As with Simon, some have the tendency to see this as an opportunity to make money. And you know as well as I do, the more numbers that we can give and tell people how many people are saved, that is just a way to get people to give more money. That is why we put them on these big sign boards. We show these big things to draw attention to what we are doing. The people in the audience are then thinking that they ought to give more money because of the productivity. In reality, it is Jesus Who saves. We do not need experts to share Christ. You can share Christ. This is what we are so excited about in seeing Jason leading a young man to the Lord. I could never have led that guy to the Lord. I am not even working with him. You guys are going to see people that I never see. This is how the church should be functioning

on its own. If you have the Spirit of God, you cannot help but tell people about Jesus.

Prayer

Father, we give You thanks for Your Word and the stirring of our hearts as we read this beginning, this birth of the church. How exciting it is to see their vibrancy and to see them wanting to be with each other. God, this is the way we should be. If your Spirit is filling us, we should not want to leave each other. We would want to be with each other and help each other if somebody has a need. Lord, may Your Spirit never leave us. Lord, we just ask that we would grow and that we would become more like You even to the point of being willing to die for this wonderful faith. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.