

“THE MOVEMENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT”
Matthew 28:16-20, Romans 15:7-13, Acts 8:9-25
August 24 & 25, 2024

“Trafalgar Square in England is known for the collection of pigeons that come there. Thousands of pigeons show up to feed on the bread crumbs that people bring.

“Doves, however, are **not** seen at Trafalgar Square. A dove is one of the most sensitive birds ever created. If a dove sniffs anything that could irritate it, it will fly away.

“The Bible portrays the Holy Spirit as a dove - very sensitive. When the Holy Spirit senses anything that is contrary to the King and His kingdom, He doesn’t want to hang around.”¹

If we desire to be filled with the Holy Spirit, we have to rid ourselves of everything that offends God. We have to fill ourselves with the truth and power of His Word, and we have to give up everything that is of this world. (Now, certainly we have to live here in the world, but we are not to be of the world or captivated by the things of this world.) The Lord and the world are completely opposite on everything, so to have the Holy Spirit of God reside within us, to empower us to do the work of Jesus Christ, we must give up on everything that the world says, and fill ourselves with all that God says. And that comes as we trust in Jesus Christ, give ourselves over to His guidance and control, and then we can humbly ask for the Holy Spirit to come into our hearts and minds, so that He might direct us to do the work of the Lord our God.

Jesus told His disciples, and us, that “...*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me*” (Matthew 28:18). As we receive Christ Jesus as Lord of our hearts, and make Him our Savior, we have access to all of the power and authority that Jesus has. But He will not let us use that power and authority to do things that are contrary to the commandments and the will of God. Why would God empower those who would use that power to work against Him? Well, He doesn’t. God knows our hearts and He knows our thoughts and intentions, and if they are contrary to His will and His ways, we will not become empowered with the authority and power of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The

¹ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 155, #466)

only power and authority available to us then, will be what we have as human beings, which is limited **at best**. And when we strive to live by our own authority and power, we inevitably **fail** badly.

Jesus desires that all who follow Him have His power and authority in order to fulfill **His** work of bringing Salvation to the whole earth. As we humble ourselves to follow Him, He then lifts us up and grants us the strength and power to do all that He gives us to do. We have been given the task of taking the Good News of Jesus Christ to the whole world, but we cannot do that unless we have His power and authority within us. All other power and authority will fail, but if we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to do His great work, we will be able to do all things (Philippians 4:13). Jesus knew that we could not do His work without His help, so He freely enables us access to the Holy Spirit as we submit ourselves to Him in all our ways. But it has to be done His way, and through His Truth.

As we've seen in our study of Acts, those who trusted in Jesus as their Savior and Messiah were richly blessed with opportunities to share this message wherever they went. When the persecution of the Church began after the stoning of Stephen, we're told that "*all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria*" (Acts 8:1b). And "*those who had been scattered preached the Word wherever they went*" (Acts 8:4). They were able to do this because of the persecution started against the Church, whereas folks would ask them why they had left Jerusalem. It would only be natural, then, for the believers to then respond by sharing their belief in Jesus Christ with those around them.

We're told that Philip also went into Samaria (Acts 8:4-8), to the north of Jerusalem, and began to preach with great success, performing many signs and wonders, just as the apostles had done in Jerusalem. This is not the Apostle Philip, but rather one of the Hellenistic Jews who were appointed to serve the poor in Jerusalem and approved by the apostles, just like Stephen was. This Philip had also been filled with the Holy Spirit and was working to share the great Good News of Jesus Christ with all the people there in Samaria.

But this was not the first time the Samaritans had heard about Jesus. The woman at the well who had spoken to Jesus and had returned to her own city of Sychar proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah (John

4), had opened up the avenue for evangelization of the Samaritans. Many had come to believe that Jesus was the Son of God at that time, and certainly word would have gotten out about Jesus through her testimony, as well as the testimony of those who had come to hear Jesus. The Samaritans were not counted as “gentiles,” but more as schismatic Jews, part of the ‘lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ Even though they showed a greater piety than many Jews, the Samaritans could also show hostility to the disciples of Jesus. Jews and Samaritans did not get along, and were almost counted as enemies, yet they found a way to overcome the hostility between them as they grew common faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

So when Philip went to Samaria, he was rekindling the fire of faith among the people there, encouraging them to put their faith and trust in Jesus as the Christ. Listen to what else happened. This is Acts 8:9-25. (READ Acts 8:9-25)

Philip had gone to Samaria to escape the persecution taking place in Jerusalem and as he went, he took the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus to the people. However, there was a man in that region who was drawing attention to himself through sorcery and magic. Simon had persuaded everyone that he was someone special, and because of this all the people thought that he was to be counted as one of those among deity (Acts 8:10). And when a person becomes so full of themselves, they begin to believe what the people say about them. So by the time Philip arrived, Simon had the awe and admiration of all the people. Oh, the pride that must have been built up in Simon!

But, hearing Philip “*proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ*” (Acts 8:12), the hearts of the people began to shift from Simon to **Philip**. So much so, that they began to profess their faith in Jesus Christ and “*were baptized, both men and women.*” They were reminded of Jesus and all that He had done among them. So they began to put their faith in Jesus. “*Simon himself believed and was baptized*” (8:13). The Holy Spirit was working in a mighty way through Philip to reach the people of Samaria with the Word of God so that they could put their trust in Jesus as the Christ.

But, because of their being bamboozled by Simon’s sorcery and magic, the Holy Spirit did not

descend upon the people. Though they had put their trust in Jesus, they still had much within their hearts that prevented the welcome of the Holy Spirit in their midst. Even as Philip continued to move around telling about Jesus, and performing great signs and miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit, the hearts of the people were not yet ready for the Spirit to move into them. Even as Simon saw the work of Philip, he was impressed by what he was doing. But the Holy Spirit does not abide in the presence of those whose hearts and minds are not fully focused upon Jesus.

You see, Simon had been “somebody special for so long” that now that the attention was no longer on him, he began to become jealous of the work Philip was doing. Philip was taking all the limelight from him, and he was no longer the “*Great Power of God*” people had said about him (8:1). People were following Philip as he preached Jesus, and Simon was envious of the attention Philip was getting. In his mind, Simon was probably contriving a scheme to get the power and authority that Philip had so that he could continue to wow and amaze the people, and get back upon that pedestal they had put him on.

But the Holy Spirit was still working among the people of Samaria, even though He was not moving into their hearts and lives. Many were coming to know Jesus through the ministry of Philip, to the point that the apostles in Jerusalem heard of the great success happening in Samaria. The apostles sent Peter and John to observe all that was happening, and when they got there, the two apostles “*prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus*” (8:15-16).

You see, even though you may have professed faith in Jesus Christ, even though you may have been baptized in His Name, that does not mean that you will automatically be filled with the Holy Spirit. Repentance of sin has to take place. Change of attitudes needs to occur. Humbling oneself before Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah, our Crucified and risen Christ, has to happen before the Holy Spirit will move into our lives. Certainly the Holy Spirit will begin to make this happen, but He will not manifest Himself or empower anyone until they are fully devoted to Jesus.

We cannot be “Christians In Name Only” (CINO’s) and expect the Holy Spirit to give us the power and authority of Jesus Christ. Our lives have to become transformed from the ways and things of this world, before the Holy Spirit will move into us. As long as we have the world’s mindset in our brain, and as long as we focus our lives on the things of this world, God is not going to empower us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. If we’re not willing to use the gifts and power of the Lord Jesus in ways that bless and honor the Lord our God, the Holy Spirit will stay at a distance, and we’ll be left to our own power and authority. **But** when we humble ourselves before the Lord, when we give up the stuff of this world and take on Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will then move in and will begin to guide and direct us.

And that was the problem that Simon had. He was not fully committed to Jesus Christ, but in his infancy of being a believer, he thought that he could continue to practice all that he had done before and still be counted as a believer and follower of Jesus. Simon’s heart was still captive to bitterness and sin. So when Peter and John arrived and prayed for the people, and began to lay hands upon the people to gift them with the Holy Spirit, Simon became desirous of that ability. He wanted IN on the action.

Up until the time of his belief in Jesus, Simon may have been able to gain new insight and ability in his sorcery and magic by paying someone to show him new material. In his career as a magician, using the dark arts of sorcery, he would have gained a great deal of money, so he innocently thought that that was how a person became able to lay hands upon a another person in order for them to receive the power of the Holy Spirit. So he did what he always did - *“he offered them money and said, ‘Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit’”* (Acts 8:19).

Folks, when we make innocent mistakes like that, be sure that there will be correction that comes to us. As the early Church was developing, the apostles are very quick to correct things that are contrary to the ways of God, and this was the second major doctrinal **error** pointed out in the early Church. The first was deliberate lying, when Ananias and Sapphira had brought money to the apostles saying that it was the total sale of their property. That was a deliberate and contrived lie that had to be immediately rectified. Truth must be kept and shared. It is essential to the Christian faith.

Here, however, there is not a death sentence given to Simon, but he hears directly that money can't buy the gifts of the Holy Spirit. "What Simon wanted was not simply that he might have the gift of the Spirit himself but rather that he might have the power to bestow [the Spirit] on other people... What was emphasized IS his sinful desire to have spiritual power for the wrong reasons and to gain that power by the wrong method. The possession of any kind of spiritual authority is a solemn responsibility rather than a privilege, and its possessor must constantly be aware of the temptation to domineer over those for whose spiritual welfare he is responsible; he must also beware of the danger of using his position for his own ends, whether as a means of making money or bolstering his own ego (I Pet. 5:2f). Simon regarded the power to bestow the Spirit in a magical kind of way, and he was prepared to pay for the privilege, thereby further revealing his misunderstanding of the nature of the Spirit. When the evil practice of obtaining positions in the church by paying a price or offering a bribe developed, the sin gained the name of 'simony' as a result of this incident."²

So Peter appropriately addressed the issue. He "*answered: 'May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!'*" (Acts 8:20). This sin had to be quickly addressed, and Peter is right to call Simon out on it. In fact, the Greek actually puts it much stronger than what we have in our Bibles. It may sound like profanity, but the Greek actually has Peter telling Simon, "*To hell with you and your money.*" Simon's interest was not in carrying on the work of Jesus to bring Salvation to the world. It was only on making himself important again in the eyes of the people. So Peter confronts this mindset abruptly and aggressively. "The very thought of obtaining a divine gift by some kind of payment betrays a total misunderstanding of the nature of God and His gifts" (I.H. Marshall, ACTS, pg. 159) God is very aware of our motives, and He will not empower those whose single goal is to make themselves look great in the eyes of those around them.

It seems that Simon had not fully confessed his sins or repented of his bitterness. Though he believed in what Philip preached about the kingdom of God and the coming of Jesus Christ as the Savior

² (I. Howard Marshall, ACTS, [Leicester, England; Inter-varsity Press, 1980] pg. 158-159)

of the world, his heart had not changed, nor had his mind been transformed. He was still deep into the mindset of sorcery and magic. He had a long way to go to become a mature follower of Jesus. Although he sought the power of the Holy Spirit, he was nowhere ready to receive Him into his life. The light of Jesus Christ had only begun to shine into his life, and he had lot more spiritual growing up to do before he would be able to fully work for the glory of God as a follower of Jesus Christ. Simon had to empty himself of his own desires and humble himself to the will of God before he could gain the Holy Spirit's assistance and power.

It's like using a dimmer switch in our homes. "Most of us have dimmer switches in our homes. Dimmer switches are designed to progressively turn up the lights. [They gradually increase the power available to the lights, thereby shining brighter a little at a time.]

"The Holy Spirit is your dimmer [switch]. What He does is turn up the light so that you can see things you couldn't see before. We have to be in tune with Him though. If you are open and listening, the dimmer does work. Illumination sets in because over time, the light gradually comes on as we study the Word"³ and learn about Jesus.

Well, Simon was only a baby Christian, struggling with pride, envy, bitterness and jealousy. He was straight out of paganism. So Peter told him, "*You have no part or share in this ministry because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that He may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin*" (Acts 8:21-23). The power of the Holy Spirit is not for sale, nor can we expect to have any part of the ministry of Jesus Christ if our hearts are focused only upon our own selfish desires.

Well doesn't that just kick all of us right in the teeth! But the hope is that as we learn about how we are preventing the Holy Spirit from working in our lives, we might "*pray to the Lord in the hope that He may forgive [us] for having such... thought(s) in our hearts.*" There is much for us to repent of, too. The question is however, will we truly pray to the Lord for His forgiveness?

³ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 151, #456)

Simon asked Peter and John to **pray** FOR HIM “*so that nothing you have said may happen to me*” (8:24). We have no record of him actually repenting of any of his former ways, and in fact, several historians document how he later became infamous as a Gnostic heretic, an enemy of the Christian church. It is up to each person to repent and pray for forgiveness. No one can do it for us - we have to do it ourselves.

But the Holy Spirit continued to move in the life of that community as the Word of God was proclaimed and Jesus Christ was lifted up as the Messiah. The people continued to respond and turn to the Lord. The light of Jesus Christ had now gone into Samaria, as Jesus had commanded the disciples to do (Acts 1:8).

The key for us today in all of this is that we need to persevere in our own faith and continue to follow Jesus in all we do and say. It’s not just enough for us to SAY we are Christians, that we BELIEVE in Jesus, but it is right for us to LIVE our faith and WITNESS that faith for Jesus in our world today.

We are the ones called to be the ambassadors for Christ Jesus in our world. We can have no part of this ministry if our hearts and minds are solely focused upon ourselves. It’s time for us to repent, too, and to seek the Holy Spirit in our own lives so that we might indeed, be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Let’s pray...Father, it is so easy for us to think that we are somebody special and do our own thing, rather than humble ourselves under Your Truth and follow Your way. Forgive us, Lord for all our wicked and evil thoughts and intentions! Wipe us clean so that we can become presentable for the Holy Spirit to abide with us. Give us such willingness to give up all that is in this world, and take on all that Jesus has given to us to be and do. Then, ONLY THEN, empower us with Your Holy Spirit so that we might become a part of the work of the ministry of Jesus Christ in our world today. Fill us so that we might take the Good News of Jesus to all those around us, that they might come to know Him, too. Come, Holy Spirit, come to us and make us truly disciples of Jesus. Use this church to be the light of Jesus in our community today, and always, in Jesus’ great Name we pray. AMEN.