

Acts 19:1-7

“Receiving The Holy Spirit”

The end of ch 18 prepares us for Paul’s entrance into Ephesus by informing us of a man named Apollos whom Pricilla and Aquila crossed paths with while they were in Ephesus awaiting Paul’s arrival. You recall that Paul had desired to be in Ephesus but had purposed in his heart to fulfill a vow that he made (evidently) while in Corinth which set him on a pretty straight course to Jerusalem in order to see his commitment to the Lord through to its completion. But he left Aquila and Pricilla in Ephesus on his way back and the Jews sought to get him to stay as well, but he said, “No can do, but I’ll be back, God willing.” and From there he left to head up to Jerusalem, fulfilled his vow, went back down to Antioch of Syria, thereby concluding his 2nd missionary journey. and We’re told that he stayed there for “some time” and as for exactly how long of a time that was we don’t know.

But Paul always seemed to have restless edge about him, he had an incredible burden to share the gospel, he knew that there was a whole world out there headed for hell apart from the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. and So he just couldn’t stay put too long in one place, but then his burden would be compounded by the fact that once he’d been to all of these places and established all these churches, his heart was always concerned for the spiritual health and well being of the relatively new believers that he’d harvested in the mission field. So he had this drive, the love of Christ compelled him to see people not only *saved*, but *strengthened* as well, or to understand it another way, Paul wasn’t a fly by night evangelist, “You’re saved, now so long!” But rather he was in the business of making disciples, of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry, rooting them, grounding them in the principles and precepts of the word of God. and He would *impart to* them, and *implant in* them the practical *application of* and down to earth *instruction in* God’s Word. He wasn’t just an obstetrician, but he was a pediatrician as well, not only seeing people born into new life, but also imparting to them the critical and constant care they needed as they were growing up in Christ.

There seems to be an epidemic on a certain level in the church today that says, “Get people saved, as many as you can, as fast as you can!” and That’s all fine and well, but once a baby is delivered, if there’s no attention given to it, or proper care provided for it, it’s not going to make it. and The point I’m making is that Paul wasn’t strictly about getting people saved only to neglect their needs once they were born again, because the statistics of conversions just don’t mean much if 6 months from now that person is nowhere to be found, and is no longer walking with Christ. There has to be time and attention given to that new believer, seeing them rooted, grounded in God’s Word, that’s what Jesus said. He said, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;*” Matt 28:19-20 He didn’t say, “Go therefore and convert as many people as you can!”

Now surely God isn't willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance and before someone can become a disciple *of* Christ they have to be saved *by* Christ, but the point is that Jesus' commanded discipleship, and that happens by (notice) *teaching* them to observe (that is obey) the word of the Lord, personally, practically, and that happens over time. So Paul started back out from Antioch for the 3rd time, going through the region of Galatia and Phrygia strengthening all the disciples, affirming them, establishing them further in the Word.

He's on route to Ephesus, but meanwhile Pricilla and Aquila run into Apollos, a man mighty in the scripture, eloquent and accurate in his articulation of the Word. Powerful and profound in his presentation, but he was lacking some vital information; he only knew of baptism of John, he lacked the rest of the account.

He didn't know of the death and resurrection of the Messiah, the ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit. and So Pricilla and Aquila took him aside after church one day, (probably took him to their place for dinner) and explained to him the reality of what all had happened. After that he wanted to head over to Corinth himself and so they gave him letters of recommendation that the churches should receive him, and he was a great help to those in Corinth who'd believe through grace, he was just a great man of God. But the information about him, and what he was preaching (a message of repentance, just like J.B.) sort of sets the stage for what Paul now encounters as he steps into the arena of Ephesus where Apollos had just left.

Vs1-3

Now there is much debate between the commentators as to the spiritual condition of these disciples at this point. Were they saved? Or were they not saved? and There's valid points on both sides, for instance, when they say, "What do you mean Holy Spirit?" That's cause for concern, because the bible says, "*But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.*" Rom 8:9 and Again, "*By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.*" 1 John 4:13 So if salvation that comes by the *Son* of God is confirmed by the indwelling and sealing of the *Spirit* of God in my life and I say, "Holy Spirit? Never heard of such a thing..." than there's reason for concern.

But the other side of that coin is; what exactly did Paul mean when he said, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit?" Because the text clearly calls them disciples (which generally, unless designated otherwise, in the NT points to disciples of Christ) and Paul plainly states that they believed. Vs2 "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you *believed*?" and One thing most commentators do agree on is that the construction of their statement to him would be better rendered, (basically) "We've never heard that the Holy Spirit has yet been given." Because vs 3 tells us that they'd been baptized into John's baptism (which points to a probability that Apollos had been the one who'd spoken to them) and John was very clear that a day was coming when the Lord's disciples would be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Matt 3:11 J.B. said, *“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”* So they no doubt were familiar with the reality of the Holy Spirit, but they didn’t know that that time had yet come. So it would seem in Paul’s eyes, that the fact that they were disciples that had been pointed to the Messiah (just as John had done) and that they’d believed upon the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (just as John had said) was never in question.

But Paul noticed a certain element, some how and in some way that was lacking in their lives. That word, “Receive” in vs 2 can speak of “taking upon,” “to gain” or “to experience.” So Paul is saying to them, “When you believed, did you experience the Holy Spirit? Did the Holy Spirit come upon your life?” and They respond, “We didn’t know that the Holy Spirit had yet been given.” Question before we move on: What was it that Paul seen, or more accurately *didn’t* see about them that caused him to probe them in this way? You don’t generally run across a group of believers and say, “Did you guys receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” That could be pretty insulting. Now the bible teaches a 3-fold ministry/experience of the Holy Spirit in and towards a person’s life. and We’ve spoken of this before, but 1st there’s the “Para” which is a simple Greek preposition describing a particular relationship that we would have (in this context) with the Holy Spirit, it could be translated, “With”, “Before” “amongst” “Beside” so on and so forth. It’s the word that Jesus used when He (speaking of the Holy Spirit) said, *“... the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”* John 14:17 The word “With” there is the preposition “Para.”

That’s the primary relationship that mankind has with the Holy Spirit on the side of pre-conversion. Jesus said that when He (that is the Holy Spirit) came, that He would convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. and So this “Para” experience with the Holy Spirit we might refer to as the “wooing” of the Spirit, whereby He comes alongside us, begins to convict us of sin, of righteousness, of judgment, He’s drawing us into an awareness of our need for a Savior and all.

The 2nd preposition that’s used to describe our relationship to/with the Holy Spirit is the Greek word “En” which means exactly what it sounds like in English, “In” or “Into.” and It’s the 2nd word that Jesus used there in the scripture we just quoted in John 14 when He said, “He dwells with you and will be in you.” and This happens at conversion, when you repent of your sin, and cry out for a Savior, Jesus Christ literally comes into you by the power of the Holy Spirit. and He seals us until the day of redemption with the Holy Spirit. When Paul was writing to the Ephesians he said, *“In Him (that is Christ) you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,”* Eph 1:13 So when you believe upon Jesus Christ, when you call upon the name of the Lord, the Holy Spirit comes into you and you are saved and sealed.

But there's a 3rd preposition that the bible uses to describe our relationship with to the Holy Spirit and that is the Greek Word "Epi" which translates into the English as "upon" that has nothing to do with our *salvation*, but it does deal with the *realization* of our ability to be the witness that God has called us to be. and That's the word that Jesus employed when He said, "*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*" Acts 1:8 Now in John Ch 20 you find where Jesus breathed on the disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." and That was their born again experience, they were at that point "saved" in the NT post resurrection sense of understanding. So the Holy Spirit was already dwelling *in* them by the time you roll around to Acts Ch 2 when the Holy Spirit comes upon them. and To me it seems that it doesn't matter what your theology teaches you about mans relationship to the Holy Spirit, it's impossible to deny that Jesus used 3 different prepositions to articulate the way we would *relate* to and have the capacity to experience with *regards* to the Holy Spirit. So this 3rd aspect of the "Upon" experience has everything to do with sanctification, and nothing to do with salvation, it's that power of the Holy Spirit at rest upon our lives that enables us to lead our lives as the witnesses that Jesus has called us to be.

Now why did I go through all that? Because when Paul says here, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" It seems apparent that the reason that he would even ask that question is because there was something about these men, a lack of power, perhaps he picked up on a pattern of compromise in their lives that really shouldn't identify one who's filled with the Holy Spirit. (Not that we don't all stumble, but maybe there was more than that with these believers). Perhaps the peace of God, the joy of the Lord, or boldness was lacking in their lives, I don't know, but there was something that said to Paul, "I don't think they're walking in the fullness of that which God has for them." The question that confronts us is, when people look into your life, or into my life as professing believers, would they (by assessing the pattern of our lives) be pressed to ask us, "Did *you* receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" Is the power of the Holy Spirit at rest upon your life in such a way as to enable you to be the witness that God has called you to be, or are you a quite carnal Christian that apart from your confession of Christ has really little to nothing else that would demonstrate to people that you're a believer at all?

If not, receive the Holy Spirit, allow Him to fill you to the overflow, rest upon and flow through your life, that you might be the witness Jesus desires you to be. "How do I do that?" The same way you receive Christ initially, by faith.

Jesus said, *“I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”* Luke 11:9-13

I’ve never understood why we’re able to receive salvation simply, but than we complicate everything beyond that point radically. If you want the Holy Spirit to rest upon your life, empowering you to be the witness God desires, than ask Him for it. But be prepared, because He’ll begin to search your heart, show you areas that He wants to carve away, and He’ll give you the power by His Holy Spirit to do that. But often times people want to hang on to the flesh life instead of dying to self, so they create this overly complicated scenario rather than simply surrendering to the Holy Spirit and dying to self, (crucifying the flesh, reckoning the old man to be dead).

I’ve often said that salvation is free, but discipleship costs, I’m not sure how totally theologically correct that is, but it gets the idea across. If you want to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit you’ve got to be willing to pay the toll of dying to self, and the self life. In the book of Philippians Paul recognized that when he spoke of knowing Christ, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if by any means I may attain to the resurrection of the dead. It’s impossible that we should know the power of the resurrection apart from being conformed to His death; even Christ didn’t experience resurrection power with out 1st dying. and The flesh dies hard, who here likes to suffer? I don’t, but I recognize that the sufferings of this present world aren’t worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us on that day. and If we really want all that God has for us, than there’s a price to be paid, Jesus said we’re to count the cost.

I want people to look at my life and be able to recognize, not a carnal compromising Christian, but that there’s a man who walks in the fullness of the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul said, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” “We didn’t know the Holy Spirit had yet been given.” “Than into what were you baptized?” You see Jesus had told the disciples (as we quoted in the 1st vs I sighted) that they were to baptize people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the *Holy Spirit*. So the idea there is that they’d have known that the Holy Spirit had come and was available had they been baptized into Christ (that is with the understanding of post resurrection, the coming of the Holy Spirit and all the rest). “Well, if you weren’t baptized into Christ, than into what were you baptized?” and They say, “Into John’s baptism”.

Vs4

I have the last portion of that scripture underlined in my bible, that we *should* believe on Him who came after John, that is on Christ Jesus. Because there is no other name under heaven, given among men by which we *must* be saved, if you're to receive everlasting life, receiving the forgiveness of sin, than you should believe on Christ Jesus. So having been up to speed with what John taught, Paul narrows the gap, pointing out the fact that *Jesus* is the Christ, the Son of the living God and that He's the Lamb of God that John pointed to as Messiah who would take away the sin of the world. and He commends them in that John's baptism was a baptism of *expectation*, or *anticipation*, it was done in *preparation* of the coming Messiah. Whom Jesus is; but the baptism into Christ is that which testified of *regeneration*, it was a *declaration*, of *identification* with the death and resurrection of Jesus.

John's baptism was a sign of repentance, Jesus' baptism was a sign of regeneration. The former looked forward to the work of the Messiah by faith, in *expectation*. The latter looked back to the finished work of the cross by faith, for the purpose of *identification*, and a *proclamation*, of an inward *transformation*.

Vs5-7

So having been prepared through repentance and the message preached by John, they were ready to receive fully the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified and embraced all that that spoke of and entailed for them. and So they were baptized into Christ specifically, identifying themselves with Him in the post resurrection sense, they embraced the message of the resurrection and what that meant for them personally. and Then notice that after that, Paul laid hands on them and the Holy Spirit came what? "*Upon*" them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. There's that preposition again, "Epi." So that the inference of the text seems to be that the Holy Spirit had already come *into* them, they believed, they were disciples, but not knowing that the fullness of the promise had been fulfilled, not knowing the death and resurrection of Christ, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit had never come *upon* them.

You see perhaps when we were talking a little while ago and I pointed out that when Jesus said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" to His disciples and that constituted their born again experience, you were thinking, "Well how does that differ from Paul's question here?" Context, context, context, Jesus was specifically speaking to them about the Holy Spirit coming into them and He told them that the Holy Spirit was still to come upon them. Here the text states plainly that they believed, that they were disciples, and when further light is shown upon their relationship to the Holy Spirit we see *not* that they were converted in the sense that the Holy Spirit came *into* them, but rather that they were empowered as the Holy Spirit came *upon* them. So to me it seems obvious, but perhaps you have a different perspective, and you'll be in some great scholarly company if you do.

Now for what it's worth this is the last time we'll be seeing a people speak in tongues in the book of Acts. But that's ok because the bible never said that the manifestation, or fruit of the Holy Spirit in a person's life would be that of speaking in tongues anyway. The bible says that, "...*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*" Gal 5:22-23 The fruit of the Spirit is not tongues, it's love, *singularly*, and then comprised with in that love is joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, so on and so forth. You will be hard pressed to find scriptural support that states that the manifestation of the Spirit in my life (that which God is looking for when He examines my life) is tongues. However the bible does say, "*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.*" 1 Cor 13:1-3 When God examines my life, it's not tongues that He's looking for, it's fruit, and the fruit of the Spirit in my life is love. What did Jesus say, "By this all will know that you're My disciples, if you speak in tongues one to another?" That's not what Jesus said! He said, "*By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*" John 13:35 That's what God is looking for, His Agape, all giving, non-self serving, non-self seeking love coursing *into*, and flowing *out through* our lives to those around us. In Matt 7 Jesus spoke of knowing the genuine article from the counterfeit prophet by looking to the fruit of their lives. Why did He curse the fig tree in Matt 21? No fruit. In Luke 13, the parable of the fig tree, every year for 3 yrs the one who planted it was looking for what? For fruit, and should it bear no fruit on the 4th yr, he said to the keeper of the vineyard, cut it down.

John 15:8 Jesus said, "*By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.*" That's why He appointed us, that we should go and bear fruit, and that our fruit should remain. God isn't looking to your life to see you speak in tongues. Hey, if you have that gift, or if you utilize that gift, praise the Lord, but whatever we do we're to do heartily as *unto* the Lord, and couched in the Agape Love *of* the Lord in our lives.

But truth be known that's not really even the central focus of this passage (the fact that they spoke in tongues) I just wanted to minimize the emphasis of that that some groups place on it. Is it legit, you bet, should we desire spiritual gifts? Absolutely, but regardless of what spiritual gift we may have, if it's not exercised in love, it's pointless as far as God is concerned. It may be real impressive to men (in certain circles) but it means nothing to God if not exercised and flowing out of His love in our lives. The primary point to be seen here is the fact that these Ephesian disciples sensed their need to get right with God, and knew that the answer to that was in God's Messiah - but they hadn't really gone any further than that. They needed to go all the way, trust in everything Jesus *is* and everything He had *done*, and to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps that's where you are at today? Maybe you realize that answer is *in* Jesus, and you've even come to believe *on* Jesus, but you haven't surrendered completely *to* Jesus. You haven't received the Holy Spirit since you've believed (again not in a *saving* way) but in a *strengthening* way. You're not the witness God has called you to be. Would you let the Lord have control of your life today? Would you let go of those things that have been hindering that work of God in your life and let the Holy Spirit have you completely? Just receive Him now, ask Jesus for the fullness of the work of the Holy Spirit in and upon your life. You've counted the cost, you're willing to undergo the fellowship of His sufferings that the power of the resurrection might rest upon your life...

Prayer Points: Lord Jesus that's our prayer, that You would teach us what it means to be surrendered to You, to have our hearts searched *by* You, showing us our wicked ways that You might lead us in the way everlasting? Lord we thank You that in Your grace you accept the faith that believes on You in a saving way, but we want to believe upon You in a *strengthening* way, that we might be the witnesses that You've called us to be. That there be nothing lacking in our lives that would cause people to question our relationship with You. Holy Spirit come upon us and fill this place with your presence, and help us to walk in love as Christ has loved us and given Himself for us. and May our lives be fruitful, well pleasing to You.

Perhaps you're here and you're sensing you're need to get right with God, and you realize the only way to do that is through Jesus Christ but you've never believed *on* Him, or placed your faith *in* Him. The Holy Spirit has come along side you, is speaking to you about your need for Jesus, but He wants to come in you, He wants to rest upon your life, but He won't violate your free will, you have to ask. and If you want your sin to be cast as far as the east is from the west, and be washed white as snow right here, right now, than give your heart to Jesus Christ The bible says if any man be in Christ he's a new creation, old things pass away, all things made brand new.