

In previous passages, we learned of the selection of men of good repute who were full of the Spirit and wisdom to oversee an administrative responsibility. That freed the Apostles to devote themselves to the Word of God and prayer (Acts 6:3-4). One of the men chosen, Stephen, became the first Christian martyr. Saul approved of the murder and then led a campaign of persecution against the Christian community.

<sup>4</sup> *Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.* Acts 8:4 Saul's mentor, Gamaliel, had warned that if the movement was of God, nothing could be done to stop it, and they might even be found to be opposing God (Acts 5:38-39). Apparently, Saul did not heed his mentor's advice. The good result from the persecution was the spread of the Gospel. Jesus had commanded the disciples to be witnesses in Samaria and beyond, but so far no one seems to have obeyed (Acts 1:8). Persecution got the disciples to do what they had up until now failed to do.

This is another example of the upside-down world of the kingdom. If we were in Jerusalem at that time and heard of Stephen being brought before the council, we would probably have prayed for his witness to be heard and peace to prevail in Jerusalem between Jews and Christians. Come on now, be honest. Isn't that what you would have asked in prayer? While it wasn't God's will for the council to sin by murdering His servant Stephen, God's will was brought to pass through it. This is that amazing conjunction of free will and God's sovereignty. It was God's will for the Gospel to go to Samaria and the entire world, and the death of Stephen caused the disciples to do what they had been hesitant to do. It was time to graduate those who had been in the apostles' training program and send them out to live what they had been taught.

Generations before, Joseph told his brothers that they meant to do evil to him but God planned that it be for good, to save many lives (Genesis 50:20). We could say the same of the martyrdom of Stephen and others in our day. **We often see something as a calamity, when God is working through it for some greater good.** When we are in times of crisis, we need to remember that God is at work. All things work together for good to those who love God even when we don't understand (Romans 8:28). All things!

Luke goes on to tell us of another man who was chosen, Philip. <sup>5</sup> *Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.* Acts 8:5 Samaritans consisted a few who had escaped captivity along with those Assyria sent to occupy the land. A few Levites were sent from captivity to instruct them in the Torah (2 Kings 17:27-28). They had their own version of the Torah that was somewhat different from the accepted Jewish version. Intermarrying with other people that moved into the area mixed their blood and religion. Jews were very biased against the Samaritans and thought they had corrupted the Jewish faith. However, Jesus did not have that animosity. The Samaritans of Sychar were the first to call Him "the Savior of the world" as they accepted Him as

**Commented [PW1]: Acts 6:3-4 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

<sup>4</sup> But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

**Commented [PW2]: Acts 5:38-39 (ESV)**

<sup>38</sup> So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail;

<sup>39</sup> but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!" So they took his advice,

**Commented [PW3]: Acts 1:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

**Commented [PW4]: Genesis 50:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

**Commented [PW5]: Romans 8:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

**Commented [PW6]: 2 Kings 17:27-28 (KJV)**

<sup>27</sup> Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the manner of the God of the land.

<sup>28</sup> Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD.

the Messiah that was coming (John 4:42; Deuteronomy 18:15). Later in Jesus' ministry, Jesus attempted to go to another village of Samaritans, but they would not receive Him. James and John wanted to call fire down on them, but Jesus rebuked them (Luke 9:52-55).

*<sup>6</sup> And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. <sup>7</sup> For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.* Acts 8:6-7 The apostles and Stephen were said to have shown signs. Here we read that Philip did as well. Signs in Scripture usually refer to some miraculous work that lends credence to the messenger's words. Sometimes they were related to predictions of the Messiah's ability to heal (Isaiah 35:5-6; Matthew 11:4-6).

*<sup>8</sup> So there was much joy in that city.* Acts 8:8 Imagine your chronically ill spouse or child was suddenly healed. But even greater is the proclamation that the long-awaited Messiah had come and given Himself as a sacrifice for sins. The Samaritans call this coming One, the *Taheb*. To this day, there are Samaritans who still practice sacrifice of rams to YHWH. These Samaritans in our passage became followers of Jesus. There is no greater joy than the joy of salvation, knowing your sins are removed and you are accepted by God. If there is anyone here this morning who has not experienced that joy, the Spirit of God invites you to come to Jesus today and confess your sins and experience His cleansing power and new life in Him (2 Corinthians 5:17).

*<sup>9</sup> But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. <sup>10</sup> They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." <sup>11</sup> And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.* Acts 8:9-11 In the second century, Justin Martyr wrote that Simon was a gnostic who did mighty acts of magic by the demons operating in him. Other commentators believe he simply practiced a form of trickery like modern magicians. Either way, he had many thinking he was someone great.

*<sup>12</sup> But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.* Acts 8:12 The good news of the kingdom is that we can enter it now by faith in what Jesus has done for us. When we accept Christ as our Savior we are adopted into the family of God (John 1:12). Jews would never accept Samaritans as converts to Judaism and baptize them. This was a radical step for the church to embrace them; but remember, the disciples had already seen Jesus do so. When Jesus said, "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields for they are already ripe for the harvest," he was in Samaria (John 4:35).

*<sup>13</sup> Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.* Acts 8:13 There are two

**Commented [PW7]: John 4:42 (ESV)**

<sup>42</sup> They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

**Commented [PW8]: Deuteronomy 18:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—"

**Commented [PW9]: Luke 9:52-56 (ESV)**

<sup>52</sup> And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him.  
<sup>53</sup> But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.  
<sup>54</sup> And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"  
<sup>55</sup> But he turned and rebuked them.  
<sup>56</sup> And they went on to another village.

**Commented [PW10]: Isaiah 35:5-6 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
<sup>6</sup> then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;

**Commented [PW11]: Matthew 11:4-6 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see:  
<sup>5</sup> the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.  
<sup>6</sup> And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

**Commented [PW12]: 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

**Commented [PW13]: John 1:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

**Commented [PW14]: John 4:35 (ESV)**

<sup>35</sup> Do you not say, "There are yet four months, then comes the harvest"? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.

differing opinions of what happened to Simon. One is that he truly believed but had not learned to crucify his old nature. The other is that he had tricked Philip into thinking he was converted. The passage clearly says he believed. Later Peter will say Simon was in the poison of bitterness. Your doctrinal conviction will most likely affect your interpretation. Signs and wonders can result in a declaration of belief that does not include a surrender to the Holy Spirit. We see that in Jesus' first Passover ministry. John 2:23-24 tells us that many believed after seeing His miraculous signs, but Jesus would not entrust Himself to them. The Jews saw many signs in Egypt, but died in the wilderness (Acts 7:40). The demons believe in Jesus and shudder in fear (James 2:19).

*<sup>14</sup> Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, <sup>15</sup> who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, <sup>16</sup> for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.* Acts 8:14-16 The apostles were still in Jerusalem. It was the deacon Philip who was taking the step to obey Jesus, and God blessed it with a great many converts. The apostles sent Peter and John, which tells us they had learned from Jesus not to be prejudiced against this people group.

The Bible is full of controversial passages because man has made so many doctrines. Doctrines are necessary. The Apostles' doctrine is what informed the early church of Jesus' teaching. But in many cases, we have taken doctrines a step too far into minutia and impugning motives, separating believer from believer. The issue here is whether you have the Holy Spirit when you are saved or if you must receive Him separately from your initial conversion. Some call it a second work of grace. I have always seen it as having the Spirit when you receive Christ, for they are inseparable, yet experiencing the work of the Spirit in your life may not come until you fully surrender yourself for God's purposes (Romans 6:13; 12:1-2). In other words, you may have the Spirit but the Spirit doesn't have all of you. When I meet a person who disagrees and sees it as two separate events in one's life, I have no reason to argue. The person can point to this passage as evidence of that conviction. In the following passage, it appears that the Ethiopian is baptized and filled with the Spirit at the same time (Acts 8:39-39). In a later passage Peter preaches to Gentiles and they are filled with the Spirit before they are baptized (Acts 11:15-16). **The important thing is that we seek to be filled with the Spirit daily!** Be being filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). It is a present tense command. Right now, be filled! We can all agree on that.

Philip baptized the converts in the name of Jesus. Greek legal documents in that time give us some insight into the meaning. For something to go "into the name" of another meant ownership was transferred to that person. Does Jesus own you? Baptism declares that you have given Him your life!

*<sup>17</sup> Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.* Acts 8:17 It is not necessary for clergy to lay hands on someone for them to receive the Spirit. It can

**Commented [PW15]: John 2:23-25 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.

<sup>24</sup> But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people

<sup>25</sup> and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

**Commented [PW16]: Acts 7:40 (ESV)**

<sup>40</sup> saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'

**Commented [PW17]: Romans 6:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

**Commented [PW18]: Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

<sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

**Commented [PW19]: Acts 8:38-39 (ESV)**

<sup>38</sup> And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

<sup>39</sup> And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

**Commented [PW20]: Acts 11:15-16 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning.

<sup>16</sup> And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

**Commented [PW21]: Ephesians 5:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

be a helpful sign, but we see in Acts 10:44 that Peter was preaching when the Holy Spirit came upon a Gentile household. It was necessary in the case of Samaritans and Gentiles that there be a confirmation that these groups were truly filled with the Spirit like the disciples were at Pentecost, otherwise Jewish believers would question whether it was possible. This was a real break from traditional Judaism that would never accept Samaritans and only accepted a Gentile convert if they were circumcised and accepted all the Laws of Moses as the rule for living.

Are you being filled with the Spirit? Is Jesus reigning in your life, or are you still just doing whatever you desire? Is your thought life under His discipline? Is He pleased to dwell in you, or are you grieving Him? If you are born-again you will not know peace and joy until you surrender to His life in you (Galatians 5:22).

*<sup>18</sup> Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, <sup>19</sup> saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."* Acts 8:18-19 He probably obtained his magical incantations by purchasing them from others. The sale of such instructions is attested to later in the book of Acts (19:19). He thought this wonder was just like any other magic he had purchased and so made an offer to Peter and John to buy the power. This shows us he is still thinking along his old nature's lines of power and influence over people, perhaps even of monetary gain. The life of Christ in us is to bring glory to Him. When we are focused upon what is in it for us, we are out of the Spirit.

*<sup>20</sup> But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!" <sup>21</sup> You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.* Acts 8:20-21 So much for Scientology and all faiths that demand a price! The things of God are freely received. Everything we have comes from God (1 Corinthians 4:7). You can't purchase anything from God. Religions that charge for so called blessings or instructions are not of God. We can pay the expenses of printing or other overhead involved in teaching or delivering the message, but the message is free. You may support a minister or missionary so that they can devote their time to their ministry, but you can't buy the message. "Freely you have received, so freely give," Jesus told His disciples (Matthew 10:8).

*<sup>22</sup> Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. <sup>23</sup> For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."* Acts 8:22-23 Again we have the question of whether Simon is born-again and simply walking in the old nature, or if he was never converted. We don't have a clear answer so I don't think we should push either perspective. We should take from it not to ever consider making personal gain from the things of God. If our heart has that intention, we need to repent. Gain isn't just monetary benefit. It can be respect from others, position of authority, or influence over others for self-esteem. It's anything other than the motivation to glorify God and do His

**Commented [PW22]: Acts 10:44 (ESV)**

<sup>44</sup> While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.

**Commented [PW23]: Galatians 5:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

**Commented [PW24]: Acts 19:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver.

**Commented [PW25]: 1 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

**Commented [PW26]: Matthew 10:7-8 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

<sup>8</sup> Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.

will. The language Peter used came from the Greek Old Testament (Deuteronomy 29:18) where God warned the people of Israel not to allow their hearts to turn to the gods of other nations, and to make sure there is no root among you that produces bitter poison. Like Stephen, the words of Scripture flowed freely from Peter.

*<sup>24</sup> And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."* Acts 8:24 It sounds as if Simon was truly repentant and knew that Jesus' power was so much greater than anything he knew. I hope Justin Martyr was wrong in his analysis of Simon and that Simon truly became a disciple. He would have a lot of unlearning to do and many lessons in humility (Proverbs 9:10).

The most difficult conversions are those of people who think highly of themselves. Remember Paul's declaration, *<sup>26</sup> For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.* 1 Corinthians 1:26 However, nothing is impossible with God. If we will humble ourselves and recognize how needy we are, we are ready to receive the blessings that come from a merciful and loving God.

*<sup>25</sup> Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.* Acts 8:25 Since Philip had blazed the trail, Peter and John saw that God was at work among the Samaritans. It reminds me of the Dalits in India, the lowest caste, which is considered by many in India to be at the very bottom of the karmic life cycles. When they hear that they are loved by God and can become sons and daughters of God, they receive the gospel with great joy. Peter and John saw this fruit and realized the opportunity and began preaching to other villages of the Samaritans.

This was the next step in the gospel going to the whole world. A few chapters later we'll see the following step of Peter preaching to Gentiles. God loves the world (John 3:16). He loves you! He wants you to experience the joy of forgiveness and the fullness of the Holy Spirit. I would say it is free, and it is, but He wants you to trust Him with your life (Matthew 16:24-25). After all, He gave His life for you.

#### Questions:

- 1 How does God work despite our choices?
- 2 How can this comfort our hearts?
- 3 What did this free Philip to do?
- 4 Why is his step so important?
- 5 Why is belief alone not enough?
- 6 When is doctrinal division good? Bad?
- 7 Why was evidence of conversion so important?
- 8 Why was Simon's offer so heinous?
- 9 Do you think Simon was sincere?
- 10 How did this help the apostles go forward?

**Commented [PW27]: Deuteronomy 29:18 (ESV-from M.T.)**

<sup>18</sup> Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit,

**Commented [PW28]: Proverbs 9:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

**Commented [PW29]: John 3:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

**Commented [PW30]: Matthew 16:24-25 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.  
<sup>25</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.