

Acts 8:14-17

14 Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. 15 The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit 16 (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). 17 Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Acts is a historical book that takes over where the Gospels leave off. The main purpose of the book is to tell the story of the beginning of Christianity where the early followers were led by the Holy Spirit. In chapter eight the Gospel is being preached in Samaria. This shows that the Word is spreading out from Jerusalem and today's Scripture reveals the importance of correct doctrine. The religious leaders that persecuted Jesus were unable to stop the ministry of Jesus. So now, during this period of history, they continue to persecute the believers. Sever persecution began in Jerusalem and due to this persecution, people scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. This is a time when Saul (who later became the Apostle Paul) was persecuting believers. The Bible tells us that he was ravaging the church, going house to house, and putting people in prison. The people that were scattered proclaimed the Word, the Good News about the kingdom of God. In the name of Jesus Christ people were getting baptized. The Bible reports that there was a man that obviously misunderstood the nature of the Spirit. As a consequence, he thought that he could make an arrangement with the apostles to grant him the Holy Spirit. However, the Holy Spirit is God's gift and cannot be bought and sold.

This brings us to today's Scripture about receiving the Holy Spirit. From the contents of the Bible we see that the role of the apostles, at this time, was a supervisory role for the Jerusalem church. The fact that Samaria received God's Word merits an apostolic visit. This section of the Bible shows the importance of correct doctrine. It is so important that apostolic authentication was required. The Samaritan believers were baptized in the name of Lord Jesus but had not received the Holy Spirit. Peter and John who have received the Holy Spirit directly from Jesus were sent to distribute the Holy Spirit among the believers. This is spiritual authentication. This is authenticated by the laying on of hands by those who have received the Holy Spirit to those who have not. Each significant step of expansion of the authentic church is tested and approved by the apostles. I emphasize the word authentic. You and I do not determine what is authentic, the Lord determines it, and it is authenticated by the Lord. The authentic church is the church that Jesus started and entrusted to the apostles.

There was an article in The Secret Place devotional by a woman that wrote about how when believers put their faith in the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, they begin a lifelong journey to be like Christ. But there is a problem - fallible humans who live in a fallen world fail to achieve holiness. So, she proposes a very good question. If achieving holiness is impossible why should holiness be our goal? Then she tells a story about a time when she was babysitting a little girl. The little girl would mimic everything that she did. Of course, the adult tasks were too hard. After repeated demonstrations, the little girl could never be perfect. So the author of the devotional concluded that the purpose was not to be perfect, but to try to be like her because she

loved her. When you receive the Holy Spirit, it is a life changing experience. You want to be like Jesus. Holiness is not about chasing the impossible but about striving to be like the Savior that we love. We can't make ourselves holy but we can focus our lives on who Jesus is, appreciate what God has done for us, and be open to the transformative work of the Holy Spirit.

I recall my own reception when I was ordained as an elder. For me that was the greatest honor. As the elders and the minister laid their hands on me, I could really feel it, it was an emotional moment, I could feel the Holy Spirit in me. It was much more than a ritual; it was a passing of the Holy Spirit. Today's Scripture shows us the significance of passing and receiving the Holy Spirit. Now, whenever I do a baptism, I make it a practice to lay my hands on the head of the person being baptized.

Today's Scripture shows us the significance of authentic doctrine. There were two movements. The unrestrained that do what they want to do and believe what they want to believe. They do it in name of Jesus so they think that everything is OK. However, the authentic church is one that actually receives the Holy Spirit as it is passed on from Jesus to the apostles to us. The authentic church holds true to the Word and the doctrine that supports it. Today in contemporary society the Christian faith is vastly splintered. There is the unrestrained with a wide variety of beliefs, radicals that teach human precepts, and many who believe in Jesus but do not participate in the Spirit filled church. Whereas, the authentic church focuses on the Word and being the authentic church that Jesus started and passed on to the apostles before humans mutated the church and worship practices to suit human desires. The authentic church receives the Holy Spirit. Those who receive the Holy Spirit are devoted, Spirit filled followers that hold true to the Word of God and the doctrine of Christ.