

# Suppression and Spread of the Gospel

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please turn with me in your Bibles to Acts chapter 8. We've been going through a series in the book of Acts. We're in chapter 8, verses 1 to 25 this evening.

And we pray now for the reading and preaching of God's Word. Heavenly Father, it is so easy, we confess, for us to think hard thoughts of you, small thoughts of you.

We pray that this evening that you would address us from your Word, magnify our vision of you, that we might see your glory in all its grandness, and your grace in all its tenderness, compassion.

That we might be empowered and emboldened to be witnesses of Jesus Christ in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Acts chapter 8, verses 1 to 25. And Saul approved of his execution, Stephen's execution.

[ 1 : 48 ] And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem. And they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church. Entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the Word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. 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. 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.

So there was much joy in that city. 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.

[ 2 : 55 ] They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the power of God that is called great. And they paid attention to him, because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.

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. Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized, he continued with Philip.

And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. Now, when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

For he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Now, when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.

[ 4 : 10 ] But Peter said to him, May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money.

You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.

For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. And Simon answered, Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.

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. This is God's holy and authoritative word.

Every year, Open Door USA publishes the World Watch List, which lists 50 countries where the persecution against Christians is most intense. And according to the 2021 report, more than 340 million Christians today live in places where they experience high, very high, or extremely high levels of persecution.

[ 5 : 28 ] That's one in eight Christians worldwide. 340 million. That's up from the 260 million and 245 million persecuted Christians from 2020 and 2019, respectively.

For many Christians around the world, even though that might seem so foreign to us, the cost of being a disciple of Jesus Christ is very high. In milder, subtler ways, Christians in the West also experience sometimes rejection and ridicule for their faith.

And we know that powerful men and women, powerful religions, philosophies, and ideologies, and powerful evil spirits oppose the advance of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

How, then, are we to bear witness to Jesus? This passage teaches us that we are to proclaim the gospel wherever we go by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And it beckons us to look at our world not with our eyes of sight, but with eyes of faith by telling us about the great persecution and the great power and the great promise that we see in this passage.

[ 6 : 46 ] First, let's look at the great persecution that the early church endured when Stephen, the first martyr of the church, was being stoned to death by his persecutors.

We looked at that passage last week. It said in chapter 7, verse 58, that the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. This was our first introduction to Saul, whom we know by his better-known Greek name, Paul.

And prior to his conversion, Saul was a notorious persecutor of the church. He says of himself in 1 Timothy 1, verse 3, that formerly he was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent of the church.

And when Stephen was being stoned to death, Saul provided the coat check service. Watching the garments of the witnesses in Stephen's trial, who by law were required to cast their first stones.

Since we know that Saul was educated at the feet of Gamaliel, we know that from Acts 22, verse 3, who was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish ruling court, it's possible that Saul is present at the trial as an assistant to the Sanhedrin.

[ 8 : 02 ] But lest you think that Saul was reluctantly complying with orders of his superiors, it tells us in chapter 8, verse 1, that Saul himself approved of his execution.

Saul thought that that was well-fitting, well-deserved, just. As we noted last week, even though the Jewish council sanctioned Stephen's execution because the Jews did not have the authority to mete out capital punishment under Roman governance, this was essentially a lynching.

And the agitated mob that lynched Stephen is not satisfied. They are sun-soaked and sweaty after exerting themselves and casting heavy stones at Stephen, but the air is still palpable with the heat of anger and hatred toward the church of which Stephen was a member.

And it says in verse 1, There arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles. The persecution was so intense that it broke up the church in Jerusalem completely.

All the believers had to scatter throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles. The apostles, who are the foundation of the church of which Christ is the cornerstone, are the only ones remaining in Jerusalem.

[ 9 : 22 ] If you think of the early church in Jerusalem as a house, it looks as though the entire structure has been raised and all that remains is the foundation. So Saul, it says, was ravaging the church and entering house after house.

He dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. With the zeal of a religious fanatic completely convinced of the righteousness of his cause, Saul was ravaging the church and he wasn't content to just go to the temple, Solomon's portico, where Christians were often gathering and speaking and teaching.

He wasn't content to just go to those public places to round up the Christians. No, he's interrogating people to find out where these Christians live and he's going from house after house to drag off against their will men and women to put them in prison.

That's the great persecution. But against that great persecution, we see a still greater power. It says in verses 4 and 5, Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word and Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.

This is a remarkable turn of events. The great scattering of the church by persecution led to the great spreading of the gospel by those very believers.

[ 10 : 58 ] Ironically, the attempt to snuff out the gospel actually spread the gospel even further so that it's no longer confined to Jerusalem and Judea, the surrounding towns.

It's now, through the ministry of Philip and others, penetrating even the city of Samaria. The persecutors of the church are unwittingly aiding the church.

And this is really encouraging Noah and in light of what Lauren shared earlier as well. It's not just the apostles who are proclaiming the gospel. The apostles are all left behind in Jerusalem.

All those scattered believers. It names Philip as one of them, but he's not the only one. All of these believers are going about and sharing the gospel. If you have ever gardened or had a lawn, you know that dandelions, which you're seeing all over the place now, are extremely difficult weeds to get rid of.

You could spend an entire summer mowing down dandelions or hauling them out of the ground, but even if you work tirelessly to remove every single one, just weeks later, even more yellow dandelion flowers sprout up again in different parts of the lawn.

[ 12 : 15 ] That's because of the extraordinary way in which dandelion seeds spread. The pretty white spherical heads of the dandelions contains approximately 150 seeds per flower.

And each plant can produce up to 10 flowers. So that means each dandelion plant can produce up to 15,000 seeds. And each dandelion seed is shaped like a parachute, enabling it to travel over half a mile over a kilometer by wind alone.

That's remarkable mileage for a little tiny flower seed. And for this reason, when you're cutting down the dandelions or uprooting them, you can unwittingly spread hundreds of its seeds.

It's a losing battle. You might as well start calling them flowers rather than weeds and learn to enjoy seeing them in your lawn. The early church was like these dandelions.

In this passage, we see that the believers in Acts were effective carriers of the seed of the gospel. In verses 45, those who were scattered went about preaching the word wherever they went, including Philip to Samaria.

[ 13 : 30 ] Verse 25 also says that after visiting the Samaritan believers, the apostles returned to Jerusalem preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans. It begins and ends with people sharing the gospel wherever they go.

In fact, the whole section of Acts from chapter 8 to chapter 11, verse 19 can be described as examples of believers sharing the gospel wherever they go.

And every Christian, that means, is a carrier of the seed of the gospel. And we must not lose our germinating potential.

Whether we are scattered by persecution or deliberately moved somewhere to do missions work, or whether we move somewhere for school or work, wherever we go, wherever we are, we must not forget that we are carriers of the gospel.

That's also an encouragement for us not to be discouraged when faced with persecution or even seeming failure in our ministries. Outwardly, if you were to visit Jerusalem that day when that great persecution broke out, it would have looked like the church was decimated.

[ 14 : 41 ] There was nothing much to see there. I mean, the apostles were left, but that was about it. It was like a tree with only its stump. What happened to all the believers, all those thousands that had been converted and baptized in recent months?

The persecution looked like a smashing success if you were to go and visit Jerusalem that day. But not visible to the naked eye was the spread of the gospel that God had sovereignly orchestrated through this persecution.

Faithful gospel ministry often invites criticism, opposition, and even persecution. Faithful gospel ministry sometimes experiences setbacks and disappointments.

Faithful gospel ministry will sometimes look like a complete failure. But even then, we must never despair because we do not see all that the Holy Spirit is doing.

God is sovereignly at work and we are to do our part of sowing, trusting that the wind of the Spirit will carry forth the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[ 15 : 54 ] As Philip did this in the city of Samaria, the response was electric. It says in verses 6 to 8, 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.

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. So there was much joy in that city. These verses highlight two things that Philip did.

It says in verse 6, When they heard him and when they saw the signs he did. So the Samaritans with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip. We know that what he was saying was proclaiming the Christ.

So they heard the good news of Jesus Christ. And they also saw signs, miraculous signs that confirmed the message, which included healings and exorcisms of unclean spirits.

And the response of the Samaritans to Philip's message is contrasted with their former way of life in verses 9 to 11. 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.

[ 17 : 05 ] They all paid attention to him from the least to the greatest saying this man is the power of God that is called great. And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.

Simon was a famous magician at that time that many ancient writers actually write about. And by magician I don't mean people, someone who practices sleight of hand and illusions.

I mean someone who practices sorcery, witchcraft, a person associated with the occult and the realm of spirits and demons. Simon unashamedly styled himself to be somebody great.

And he was quite successful in promoting himself because people from the least to the greatest paid attention to him. The poor as well as the rich, the educated as well as the uneducated, the weak as well as the strong and the powerful, they all regarded him highly saying that this man is the power of God that is called great.

This is likely a divine title that Simon claimed for himself. Early 2nd century Christian apologist and philosopher Justin Martyr who was himself a Samaritan before coming to faith in Jesus writes in one of his books that his fellow Samaritans said that Simon the magician is God quote, God above all power and authority and might.

[ 18 : 37 ] 2nd century pastor Irenaeus also says in his book Against Heresies that Simon the magician quote, represented himself in a word as being the loftiest of all powers that is a being who is the father over all and he allowed himself to be called by whatsoever title men were pleased to address him.

So he was quite a self-absorbed man who had grandiose claims about himself but because of his powers of sorcery people actually believed him. but all of this changes when people of Samaria are confronted with a truly great power the power of the living God and when they hear the good news of Jesus Christ the true God incarnate their transformation is seen here look at the word pay attention paid attention it says in verses 10 and 11 that the Samaritans paid attention to him to Simon but now it says in verse 6 the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip their attention is shifted away from Simon the magician as a result of Philip's ministry and notice what exactly people are paying attention to in verse 6 formerly they all paid attention to him to Simon himself they were amazed by him and thought him to be the great one the power of God but look at verse 6 it says the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip this is carefully phrased and I believe intentionally so because the same phrase is used later in Acts chapter 16 verse 14 to say that the Lord opened Lydia's heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul charlatans false messengers always bring attention to themselves as Simon the magician did but true messengers of the gospel always bring attention to the message because they know well that they themselves have no power to save because they know that only Christ and only his gospel can save because they know that they themselves have no power to perform signs and wonders because they know that they are merely conduits instruments in the hands of God so Philip is not interested in bringing attention to himself garnering the acclaim of men he's simply concerned with being faithful to his

Lord by faithfully conveying the message that he was entrusted and due to Philip's faithful ministry and the power of the Holy Spirit many men and women are converted and baptized it says in verse 12 in fact verse 13 says even Simon himself believed and after being baptized continued with Philip and seeing signs and great miracles performed he was amazed in verses 10 to 11 Simon called himself great and amazed the people in verse 13 Simon is himself amazed by the great miracles that God performed through Philip the man who used to have crowds of people flocking to him and gawking at him now follows Philip around like a groupie no great powers or boasts of men can hold a candle to the power of God sometimes I see articles or books written about

Christian ministry and they say we're competing with Hollywood and Netflix so we need to make our sermons more entertaining they say we're competing with pop artists and concerts so we need more professional worship bands and to compete with LED stage lights and fog machines hear this Simon was a sorcerer who had captivated the people of Samaria from the least to the greatest he was so compelling that people thought he was a deity and yet he can do nothing when the Holy Spirit does his signs and wonders and brings the gospel of Jesus Christ to bear with conviction on the hearts of man and woman he can do nothing to stop the conversion of his audience and the loss of his business in fact

Simon himself who is who had made a career of wowing people is wowed and won over so let's not patronize God and treat him like a has-been act or a gig that needs some extra help from our amazing creative minds instead let's humble ourselves before him confess our own inadequacies and weaknesses and ask for his help ask for his power because when the power of the Holy Spirit comes upon his church there is nothing that can stand in their way this also means we have nothing to fear when we face powerful manifestations of the spiritual forces of evil often in foreign missions contexts when facing literal witch doctors and sorcerers who claim and manipulate supernatural power people who captivate and rule others hearts with fear when they threaten us with curses and incantations and whatever else we have no need to be afraid the rulers and the authorities the cosmic powers over this present darkness the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places have no power over the

[ 25 : 05 ] Lord Jesus Christ who is seated at the right hand of the Father whose name is exalted above every name that is named in heaven or on earth or under the earth the spirit of the risen Lord Jesus indwells us empowers us and goes with us and there is nothing that can stand in his way we are to proclaim the gospel wherever we go not by our power but by the power of the Holy Spirit that's the great power that we see and now we turn to the great promise in verses 14 to 25 it says in verse 14 now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God they sent to them Peter and John this is the first time in the book of Acts that Samaria has received the word of God throughout this passage Luke emphasizes the fact that the gospel is going beyond Jerusalem and Judea into Samaria five times in this passage alone he mentions

Samaria and Samaritans to make sure we don't miss the significance of the fact that the gospel ministry is now taking place in Samaria and this is connected to the great promise of Jesus in Acts chapter 1 verse 8 which is the programmatic verse of the entire book of Acts it's like the thesis statement but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth the book of Acts follows this outline recounting the spread of the goodness of Jesus in Jerusalem in chapters 1 through 7 in all Judea and Samaria in chapters 8 to 12 and to the end of the earth in chapters 13 to 28 Jerusalem was the center of Jewish worship and further out in Judea and Samaria you found syncretic Judaism mixed with folk spirituality and elements of other religious traditions and then the end of the earth represents the realm of the nations the Gentiles who practice pagans we are now at this point of the book in the second stage of the gospel's advancement where the gospel multiplies among the Samaritans

Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel when it was divided into two Israel and Judah and the name Samaria eventually came to be used to refer to the district and sometimes even to the entirety of the northern kingdom and when the Assyrians captured Samaria in 722 BC they deported all the Israelites of substance and means and then left behind other Israelites and then settled that land with foreigners who then intermarried with the remaining Israelites leading to a form of syncretized Judaism and when the Jews had been the Jews had been deported who had been deported returned to their homeland from exile they viewed the Samaritans as kind of half Jews people who were sub-Jewish both in their ethnicity and religion and one notable religious difference between them

I mentioned last week is that the Samaritans saw the Mount Gerizim in Shechem in the city of Shechem as the center of worship while the Jews saw Jerusalem and Mount Zion as the center of worship and considering this it's notable that Stephen in the previous chapter in Acts chapter 7 pointed out that Joseph one of the Jews revered by the patriarchs was buried not in Jerusalem but in Shechem he did this to emphasize that God's presence is not confined to Jerusalem and that God's powerful and gracious work transcends the boundaries of Israel and with that detail Luke deftly prepared a way for chapter 8 where even Samaria receives the word of God and when the apostles at Jerusalem heard of the reception of the gospel in Samaria it says in verse 14 that they sent to them Peter and John the reason for ascending them is given in verse 15 they came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy

Spirit this was necessary because as verse 16 says the Holy Spirit had not fallen not yet fallen on any of us but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus this raises the question of how did they know that the Holy Spirit had not come upon the Samaritans earlier in Acts chapter 2 17 and 18 at Pentecost Peter explained that the descent of the Holy Spirit is a fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel 2 28 to 32 and Peter and John knew likely from Philip's report that the Holy Spirit had not fallen upon them yet because there was no spirit of prophecy evident among them when we repent and believe in Jesus and are baptized in his name the Holy Spirit indwells us he brings genuine conviction of sin and joy of salvation as we see in this passage he sheds the love of God upon our hearts so that we love God in response and seek to please him he produces his fruit within us and distributes his gifts among us gifts such as tongues prophecy healing he transforms us and this is not an imperceptible thing it's noticeable to the apostles that the

[ 31 : 00 ] Holy Spirit had not fallen upon a Samaritan this is a very intriguing and surprising situation you can see on the screen what Peter preached in Acts 2 38 to 39 repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit for the promises for you and for your children and for all who are far off everyone whom the Lord God calls to himself so scripture ties the reception of the Holy Spirit to baptism in the name of Jesus Christ and in this passage we see that the Samaritans have done exactly what Peter said they needed to do they've repented and they believed and they've been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and yet where's the Holy Spirit what gives this is supposed to be an odd situation

Luke acknowledges the strangeness of this when he notes that the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen on any of them but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus the word only highlights this conspicuous absence of the Holy Spirit because we saw earlier in chapter 1 verses 46 Jesus commanded the apostles to wait for the promise of the Father but he said you heard from me for John baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now the days of John's baptism of water has passed now is the age of baptism of the Holy Spirit so it is unique that these Samaritan believers have not yet received the Holy Spirit despite the fact that they have received the word of God so what's the reason for this unusual delay why did God wait to send the Holy Spirit until Peter and John came to lay their hands on them and pray for them the best the best explanation seems to be that this is a special moment in God's salvation plan when salvation which is from the

Jews is extended to the Samaritans Samaritans were accustomed to being treated as second class Jews they were never fully received into the covenant community of God in Ezra chapter 4 when the Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple the Samaritans approached these Jews and said to them let us build with you for we worship your God as you do and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Eserhaddon king of Assyria who brought us here but the Jews rejected them and said you have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God but we alone will build to the Lord the God of Israel this ancient rivalry and enmity between them were so strong that they wanted nothing to do with each other as we see in John chapter 4 it's in that context of hostility Peter and John representatives of the twelve apostles who according to Luke 22 30 sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel in the kingdom of God personally come to

Samaria to physically lay their hands on the Samaritans Samaritans and offer them the right can of fellowship laying on of hands in the book of Acts occurs in context of appointing someone for a special ministry or for healing or for impartation of the Holy Spirit it seems to be an outward representation of an inward transfer of the Spirit's power the application of the Spirit's power God this is God's way in sending Peter and John of authenticating and legitimizing the inclusion of the Samaritans to the church of God this is a momentous occasion there cannot be two separate churches the Jewish one and the Samaritan one there can only be one church of Christ this was not a case of Philip the rogue evangelist offering salvation to

Samaritans when God himself had no plans of doing that God is himself putting his stamp of approval on Samaria's reception of his word Samaritans are no longer second class Jews they are not half brothers but full brothers and sisters in the family of God they are not resident aliens but full citizens in the kingdom of God they're not visitors or observers but full members of the church of God this is the Samaritan Pentecost and God had delayed it to reveal and confirm his salvation purposes the spirit of God fell upon the Jews in chapter 2 he now falls upon the Samaritans in chapter 8 and then he will fall upon the Gentiles in chapter 10 of course the Holy Spirit can descend upon a group of believers in power today also but these three occasions are unique unrepeatable events that mark the initial reception of the

[ 36 : 31 ] Holy Spirit by Jews Samaritans and Gentiles respectively the implications of this are manifold over the last year or so we have gone through a health crisis as well as a turbulent election season our world is full of divisions and factions Democrats versus Republicans Blacks versus Whites Urbanites versus Ruralites Rich versus Poor Americans versus Chinese but such divisions must not create a rift within the church of Christ as it does in the rest of the world this is why Ephesians 4 3 to 6 tells us that we are to be eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace there is one body one spirit just as you recall to the one hope that belongs to your call one

Lord one faith one baptism one God and father of all who is over all and through all and in all over the last year or so we as a local church have also faced many tensions and potentially divisive issues and we will undoubtedly face more in the coming months and years should we gather in person for worship and fellowship or not in the middle of a pandemic should we wear masks during worship or not should people who have already had covid get vaccinated or not should we meet for worship on saturday morning or on sunday evening you probably have your own convictions on all of these matters as do I and we should frankly acknowledge that we don't all agree on these matters however these disagreements do not nullify the fact that in one spirit we were all baptized into one body and for this reason with all humility and gentleness with patience bearing with one another in love we must strive to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace with humility not prideful condescension or dismissiveness with gentleness not harshness or rudeness with patience not impatience or irritability in forbearing love not suspicion or indifference and many of you have been fighting valuing for the unity of the church over the last year or so and



I want to encourage you and exhort you to do so more and more and the reception of the Holy Spirit by the Samaritans also has implications for our evangelistic efforts. Jews and Samaritans were sworn enemies yet Philip the evangelist went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ because being indwelt by the Holy Spirit is not an exclusive prerogative of ethnic Jews but of all those who put their faith in Jesus Christ. People therefore we have no right to withhold the gospel from anyone not even from our worst enemies who would you say are people in your life that oppose you maybe political opponents theological opponents academic opponents racial or ethnic opponents workplace opponents. Maybe it's simply a rude and selfish neighbor that makes your living situation miserable.

Regardless, we have no right to withhold from them the saving news of Jesus Christ. Because we have been commissioned as witnesses of the risen Christ, and we are to proclaim the gospel wherever we go by the power of the Holy Spirit.

But this story has a twist. It says in verses 18 to 19, The word translated power in verse 19 is more frequently translated authority.

[ 41 : 11 ] It refers to the right to control something, to dispense something. Simon's selfish ambition is now laid bare before our eyes. He is essentially coveting the apostolic office.

In the book of Acts, it's not only the twelve apostles who pray for and lay hands on people to receive the Holy Spirit. Later in chapter 9, Ananias, who is not one of the twelve, lays hands on Paul and prays for him to receive the Holy Spirit.

And he's filled with the Holy Spirit. In chapter 19, rather Paul himself, who is not one of the twelve, preaches and baptizes and lays his hands on believers and they receive the Holy Spirit.

Not on believers, on new converts. And they receive the Holy Spirit as they're converted and baptized. Sometimes the Holy Spirit even comes upon people without the laying on of hands. Like in Acts chapter 10 when he falls upon the Gentiles even before they are baptized.

So it's silly, in a sense, to think that we can contain the activity of the Holy Spirit to the touch of our two hands. But Simon the magician was used to thinking that way because he's used to paying money to exchange magical secrets.

[ 42 : 25 ] That's how he made his living. So he applies that pagan mentality to this situation. He thinks he can buy the gift of God with money to acquire the authority to dispense the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

And Peter is understandably offended and we see his fiery response in verses 20 to 30. May your silver perish with you because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money.

You have neither part nor lot in this matter for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of your heart. This is where we get the term simony.

Have you guys heard of that term? Simony? It's a term that we get from church history. It was historically used to refer to attempts to buy or sell with temporal price something that is spiritual.

For example, if you pay a pastor money so you can be appointed a deacon, that's Simon. There are people who actually think this way.

[ 43 : 36 ] But spiritual benefits cannot be bought. Peter tells Simon, you have neither part nor lot in this matter for your heart is not right before God.

Earlier in chapter 1, the word lot or the word share, it's the same word, was used to refer to the apostolic ministry of the 12. And when they were choosing by lot who will be the 12th apostle to replace Judas Iscariot, they prayed, you, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen.

God who knows man's hearts chose Matthias for the lot of apostleship. And here, because Simon's wicked, selfish heart is laid bare, Peter rebuffs his advances and tells him, you have neither part nor lot in this matter, in this ministry, for your heart is not right before God.

When God sent Samuel to anoint the new king in 1 Samuel 16, 7, He told him, do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him, for the Lord sees not as man sees.

Man looks on the outward appearance, the Lord looks on the heart. That's why qualifications for officeholders in the church in Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3 emphasize the person's character.

[ 44 : 57 ] I don't care how much money you give to the church or what kind of a big shot you are at your workplace or out in society. I don't care if Joe Biden or George Clooney or Oprah Winfrey or Justin Bieber or Jeff Bezos or Dalai Lama walks into our church service.

Simon was a celebrity and most likely rich. He clearly thought he could afford the great power, authority of dispensing the Holy Spirit.

But his conversion, which undoubtedly would have garnered a lot of attention from the region, does not automatically make Simon hold standing authority in the church.

wealthy people, powerful people who are wicked think that they can get whatever they want with their deep pockets. They try to buy politicians, police officers, newspapers, and even judges.

But to think that you can buy and control the spirit of the living God is the height of human humor. This is why Simon is so sinful.

[ 46 : 12 ] It offends the glory of God. It makes him out to be some lesser deity that you can manipulate and control. But Simon is sinful for another reason.

It offends the grace of God. Why does Peter say in verse 20 that Simon can't buy the authority to impart the Holy Spirit? Because it is the gift of God.

The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, who applies all the saving benefits of Christ to us, is the gift of God.

And a gift is by definition not something that is bought, but something that is freely given. I often give my daughters, whom I love, gifts, whether it's clothes, food, books, or toys.

But imagine one day that they came up to me with four quarters that they had saved up and said, Dad, thank you for all that you've done for us.

[ 47 : 25 ] We finally saved up enough money to pay you all back. That would make me maybe laugh at first, but that would make me so sad and insulted.

Because they miss my heart as their father. Because they have reduced my loving father-daughter relationship with them to a market transaction.

But this is so often what we do with God. Non-Christians, and sometimes even Christians, try to buy or earn the favor of God with what they bring to the table.

Look at what I've done, God. Look at what I've paid to you. Look at my devotion. Look at my good works. Look at my tithes.

Thinking that we can earn, by our own merits, the favor of God, the salvation of God, the grace of God, the power of God. But that is no less foolish than what Simon did here.

[ 48 : 45 ] Because it also spurns the grace of God. God doesn't need anything from us. We can neither deserve nor afford the presence of God, the gift of God, His Spirit.

But God offers Himself to us freely in Jesus Christ. Jesus says in Luke 11, He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, will He not also with Him give us all things?

God sent His beloved Son, His only Son, Jesus, to die for our sins on the cross and to rise from the dead, to give us eternal life.

He owed us nothing. We broke our end of the covenant. We were sinners destined for and well deserving of eternal punishment. But out of His rich mercy, out of His endless compassion, out of His loving kindness, God sent Jesus to be our Messiah, to save us.

That, more than anything else, reveals the heart of God toward us. Do you think then that God would begrudged to give you His Holy Spirit?

[ 50 : 35 ] We have freely received, and now we are commissioned to freely give.

As recipients of the great promise of the Holy Spirit, let's go liberally sharing the good news of Jesus Christ wherever we go by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, we ask, we claim this great promise which You have already given to us. we pray for more and more the feeling of the Holy Spirit who already indwells us.

That we might live in spite of great persecution with awareness of Your great power, remembering Your great promise to bear witness to Jesus to the end of the earth.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.