

“THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH AND THE SPIRIT OF ERROR”

Acts 8:14-24

Pastor Keith E. Gephart

INTRODUCTION

Persecution led to more preaching in various places.

Who went about preaching? Not the apostles; but the rest of the people!

The conversion of the Samaritans was genuine: compare “believed” and “baptized” with “received” in v. 14.

There are **two spirits** at work in this passage:

- A great spiritual endowment—The Spirit of Truth—the Holy Spirit.
- A great spiritual conflict—the spirit of error—satanic influence.

Such is still the case today. Why should we be surprised?

You must be on the alert for the “spirit of error”, but must submit to the Spirit of Truth.

I. GREAT SPIRITUAL ENDOWMENT (14-17)

Questions: *Do these verses support Pentecostal teachings?*

Do these verses support ritual confirmation practices?

A. Concern of the Apostles (14a)

They took their responsibility very seriously.

B. Commission of the Delegates—Peter and John (14b)

- As often in the gospels and Acts, Peter and John appear together.
- They were chief apostles—two of Jesus’ inner circle.
- Yet, notice that even Peter was *sent* by the other apostles!
- This is the same John who in Luke 9:54 had suggested to Jesus that maybe they should call down fire from Heaven to destroy the unresponsive Samaritans.

C. Confirmation of the New Converts (15-17)

1. Prayer (15-16)

- That they might “receive the Holy Spirit”
- He had not yet “fallen upon any of them.” This expression conveys the idea of abundance and power and spiritual gifts—not the indwelling of the Spirit which occurs the moment a person believes—Rom 8:9.
- “They had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

- A similar situation took place on the day of Pentecost: the people were already saved.
- Acts shows us that this gifting experience was common for those who were ministered to directly by the apostles.
- **This was Peter’s second use of the “keys of the kingdom” described in the Book of Acts.**

2. Laying on of Hands (17)

- In this case for spiritual gifting—not for baptism, or for ordination, or for healing (see Hebrews 6:2).
- In later times primarily for fellowship and solidarity—such was indicated here also.
- Peter and John indicated that the Samaritans were fully a part of Christianity along with the believers in Jerusalem.

3. Reception of the Spirit (17):

Not confirmation like that performed by Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Episcopal, Lutheran, and other such churches.

- The Spirit immediately indwells a believer (Rom. 8:9; 5:5; Eph. 1:13; I Cor. 3:16; 6:19).
- No “apostolic succession” is taught in the New Testament.
- Delegates of apostles could not carry on apostolic privileges—like Philip in this passage. They could not “impart spiritual gifts.”
- Note that no one came to “confirm” the eunuch from Ethiopia mentioned later in this chapter. Wasn’t he a “full Christian”?
- What about believers in Damascus? Who laid hands on them?
- What about distant converts?
- Confirmation is not taught in the New Testament—nowhere is the church commanded to practice it as an ordinance! Giving spiritual gifts was a prerogative of the apostles—not of the entire church. Nor did the apostles dispense gifts to everyone!
- At any rate, this practice **has nothing to do with infant baptism** and a later “confirmation” by the individual when reaching maturity.

Not “a second work of grace” such as that practiced by Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.

- Note that sometimes this “gifting” occurred at the believer’s salvation: Acts 10, 19).
- At other times the gifting occurred after the believer’s salvation: Acts 2, Acts 8).

- **The key in each instance is APOSTOLIC PRESENCE.**
- Ephesians 5:18-19 spells out the norm for believers—we must not be drunk with wine, but must be continually filled with the Spirit—as evidenced by **singing, thanksgiving, and submission.**

Such is the **Great Spiritual Endowment**; but, there is also **great spiritual conflict** (18-24)

II. GREAT SPIRITUAL CONFLICT (18-24)

Notice the two Simons in this passage; be careful in playing “Simon Says”.

A. Simon’s Offer (18-19)

- Notice again the importance of outward display to Simon: “He saw.”
- The Spirit was bestowed by the laying on of the apostles’ hands”. Only such hands could bestow the Spirit in NT times!
- To Simon, the apostles had greater magical powers than he did; surely such powers would be for sale for the right price: “He offered them money.”
- Ever since this incident the practice of “simony” has referred to such mercenary use of spiritual benefits in practices such as **indulgences, sale of ecclesiastical privileges and offices, etc.**
- It is still far too common to allow people to pay their way into spiritual positions and privileges!
- Note how thoroughly **materialistic** was Simon’s offer here;
 - 1) He denied the personal Holy Spirit.
 - 2) He denied the Spirit who produces holiness in believers.
 - 3) The Spirit brings genuine salvation in one who believes; He also develops godly character. He is **not for sale**; neither are **His gifts for sale**.

B. Peter’s Outrage (20-23)

1. Simon’s Destiny (20): “May your silver be for perdition with you.” Peter does not pronounce a “curse” on Simon here; v. 22 shows his desire to see Simon saved! Peter is saying that Simon and his silver belong to hell and that he is currently on his way there!

Peter’s is a “vehement expression of horror” (Knowling, 218). He spurns Simon’s offer and warns him at the same time. Maybe Judas was in view here also. Simon’s silver is dragging him to hell.

2. Simon’s Portion (21)—he has “no part or portion” in this matter—that is, in the teaching—the Gospel itself, the Word of God preached by the apostles, and in the possession of the Holy Spirit.

We do have a portion (Col 1:12—share in the inheritance)

3. Simon’s Heart (21b, 23)—“Your heart is not right before God.”; “you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.” *This expression also indicates*

the “bitter root” of Hebrews 12:15—as described in Deut. 29:18—and its pernicious effects upon others.

4. Simon’s Need (22):

- “Repent” (have a change of mind and heart) of this wickedness of yours.”
- Pray the Lord that “if possible the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.”
- Peter does not doubt forgiveness for genuine repentance; but he doubts whether Simon, if he holds to his wicked stubborn ways, could repent and therefore be forgiven.

C. Simon’s Fear of the Consequences (24)—“YOU pray for ME”—“so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.”

- This statement of Simon shows the hollowness of his “faith” and his ignorance of the way of true repentance.
- He won’t pray for himself.
- He only wants deliverance from the consequences of his sin, not from the sin itself.

Was Simon saved? *I am convinced that he was not:*

- He had a superficial belief due to his being impressed with the miracles (13).
- The passage paints a contrast between him and the other “believers”.
- He is strongly rebuked by Peter—with the threat of Hell!
- He seems to have no personal sense of sin.
- The testimony of Church tradition shows that he became a consistent opponent of Christianity in doctrine and in practice.

CONCLUSION

Yes, **you must be on the alert for the “spirit of error”, but must submit to the Spirit of Truth.**

But, this is especially true in your own life! Are you genuinely saved?

Many make professions of faith—Are you truly saved? Or:

- Is your belief superficial?
- Are you in this for gain?
- Did (do) you have a personal sense of sin? Or, do you merely fear judgment?
- How is your life turning out?