

Acts 19

Read Acts 19:1-10: Why would Paul ask some disciples if they had the Holy Spirit involved in their life? I suppose that he wanted to know if they were saved; or just students of truth. There is a difference. Acceptance of truth does not fully equate to salvation. This is probably a good pattern for us to pursue with our loved ones. We have a group of church goers; but they may not all be saved. Paul is discovering that there are people out there in the congregation who are resting assured...but they are not quite there yet. We tend to always think that we have gone far enough, until we discover otherwise.

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” ³ Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵ Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3)

I recall many years ago attending a religious forum at a Presbyterian Church. It was hosted by some Westmont Seminary students. I observed a number of world religions calling on their gods and offering prayers in the sanctuary of the church. Later on, I asked them to not actually ask these clerics to call on their god here. A simple question and answer session would have been fine. The arrogant response I got from the seminary students was to mock me for fearing that we were worried about hurting God’s feelings. My response was that the bigger issue was pews full of semi-lost sheep who will follow any voice of reason. Secondly, I was sure that God would not want Muslim’s calling on Allah in our church.

These disciples may have already been duplicating their faith. We cannot transmit what we do not have ourselves. Sometimes you just don't know what you are missing.

Paul came from a world of logic and developed patterns. His predisposition to win people over with facts has shifted since he met Jesus. Now, Paul had just met some disciples who were similarly not even aware of the Holy Spirit. What would that be like? I grew up in the Lutheran Church. We had creeds, epistles, liturgy, prayers and worship. We prided ourselves on having the truth. We believed in the Holy Spirit. Even so, it still felt like I was trying to enjoy a weekly funeral. It was hard to stay awake. These churches had no issues acknowledging the reality of the Holy Spirit; but there was not a lot of spiritual activity.

The Holy Spirit is the part of God who lives inside of us. He lives at the core of our being, right next to our emotions and personality. Our spirit is the only portion of us that can go to heaven...not our body. We need to get in touch with the Spirit of God and our own spirit. This is one reason that God puts a premium on being contrite with a lot of intellectual honesty. He sees the *yard sale* in our heart and mind. There is no reason to attempt to recharacterize it. Otherwise, we are not even having a real conversation with God.

¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:16)

When we worship God, it is not with robotic words. It has to resonate with us. It has to mean something. Being in relationship with God is like being in relationship with a person. You both have to talk, listen, and do things together. You can read your bible without listening. You can pray without talking, too.

We are not just talking about acknowledging what God has said to be true. It includes knowing God on some level because we have spent time talking and listening to him. It includes expressions of appreciation and expectations of good from him. It also includes brutal introspection and inviting him in to clean things up.

²² You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24)

These 12 disciples in Ephesus were baptized into John's baptism of repentance. This act of obedience is an awareness of sin coupled with a surrender to God for forgiveness. It could be compared to the biblical circumcision of an adult. The baptism of the Holy Spirit takes it to the next step. That is where we symbolically let our old self die, with all of our very personal priorities. We come up out of the water as a new spirit-led person. It is a funeral and a birth. We let ourselves be redefined by God. This is why infant baptism may bless the parents, but it is not an act of faith from the children (unless they are of age). As a side note, it is interesting that Apollos (chapter 18) was also unfamiliar with the Holy Spirit. It seems that someone was teaching about God and leaving out the part about the Holy Spirit. Like the disciples, we have to look for the next steps of faith in our lives. If faith is alive, it will move forward and not just lay down and never move.

⁶ But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11)

One evidence of the Holy Spirit is a manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These 12 disciples began to speak in tongues and to prophesy. We do not necessarily speak in tongues or prophesy when we are truly saved. That is a special gift given to whomever God needs to give it to. I had a friend who desperately wanted to speak in tongues. We met and read scripture and prayed for months seeking this gift for him. It never came.

Paul and the disciples were removed after 3 months of sharing in the synagogue. Some hard-core religionists spoke evil about believers. They moved to a secular forum for a couple of years.

Read Acts 19:11-20: Those who have a legitimate use for a spiritual gift are more likely to obtain it; as opposed to someone who just wants it. Paul was getting all kinds of healing powers bestowed onto him. He was not focused on healings.

⁴ There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶ And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. ⁷ But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: ⁸ for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ But

one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. (1 Corinthians 12)

Spiritual gifts are interesting. I have seen that the biggest users are often in nondescript and anonymous and hidden places. They are not the end-all for the believer. Some quasi-cult church groups claim that all true believers should be able to demonstrate their spiritual gift. Not so. They are handed out according to our assignments and others' needs. God was using the gifts to separate the real and false healers. Even Paul's handkerchief could heal people. Conversely, some religious exorcists tried using Jesus' name to exorcise demons. They got abused and publicly humbled by these demons. This reminds me of how Ananias and Sapphira were killed for mimicking saints who gave up everything for the cause.

I have worked with men who were used by God to inspire souls to draw near to Christ. They funded some awesome God-inspired events. Individually, some of these guys could not be trusted in business. It is so crucial that we totally focus on the fact that good things come only from God. The vessel of blessing may be pretty messed up or compromised.

Exorcism was popularized years ago by some movies that sensationalized practice. The recorded annual number of exorcisms *recorded* in the US are 300-500, largely handled by the Catholic Church. I don't know anyone who actually records/documents exorcisms. There may be tens of thousands of exorcisms done on a worldwide basis annually. The main idea should be that a person cannot be both possessed by the Devil and God at the same time.

This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5)

Once we are saved, the Holy Spirit lives in us. Demons can hassle us and tempt us; but they cannot possess or dwell in us. The best strategy to exorcise a soul is to begin with a lot of prayer. Next, you want to try to get them to receive Christ as their savior. Thrill seekers may wish to become healers or exorcists. But God avoids sensationalism.

¹⁸ And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. ¹⁹ Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁰ So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. ²¹ However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." (Matthew 17)

One sign of good fruit from an exorcism ministry or a cult deprogramming is the burning of evil books. God wants our minds to be holy. We should not read anything about witchcraft, astrology, or other dark powers. When we exit a harmful lifestyle, we need to *blow up the bridges behind us* so we can never go back.

Read Acts 19:21-41: Paul and the evangelists were telling people to get rid of their evil influences. Their magic books were voluntarily burned. They were also destroying their silver goddess statues of Diana.

² And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. ³ Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone.” ⁴ So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem. (Genesis 35)

This really struck a nerve, because idolatry is big business. The silversmiths were experiencing a big drop in their idol sales. Ephesus and Corinth and other places having idol temples were more like year around destinations with art shows, souvenirs, plays, musicals, and audience participation opportunities. This stuff was all dying down with the onset of Christianity. There was a similar societal and business effect during the Great Awakening in America. Between 1730 and 1740 and at later times many Americans turned to God as the Holy Spirit began to affect many lives. This led to the temperance movement, Prohibition and the shutting down of bars.

What kind of zombies would yell *Diana of the Ephesians* for two hours! That is nuts. These people were as lost as our counterculture demonstrators today. Neither knew what they were talking about. It was a similar tribalism, like a mascot for pro team. Everybody is speaking mindless chants, and listening to no one else.