



**Acts 19:1-20**  
**Have You Received the Holy Spirit?**

Summary: What difference does the Holy Spirit make in my life?

Christians often speak of having a “relationship” with God. That is made possible *by* Jesus and *through* the Holy Spirit. When we respond to the gospel, when we surrender to God, the Holy Spirit indwells us, restores us, and enables us.

This morning we’ll see how this works as the Apostle Paul encounters a group of people that know a little bit about God, but don’t know the full story and by the time we end I’ll be asking how we should respond personally to what we see happening in the Scripture.

If you have questions about the Holy Spirit, if you want to grow spiritually, or if you’ve been struggling with a sense of conviction that maybe God is calling you to get rid of some of the things in your life, you’re going to be interested in what we see this morning. Read with me:

**Acts 19:1** And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples **2** he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”  
So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.”  
**3** And he said to them, “Into what then were you baptized?”  
So they said, “Into John’s baptism.”

So Paul runs into a group of people who seem to know some things about God, but they’re missing the most important part of the story – they know about the ministry of John the Baptist, but haven’t heard of Jesus.

John was a famous prophet sent by God right before Jesus showed up. John and Jesus lived at the same time. They knew each other. They were actually related, as cousins. But before John fully understood who Jesus was, God sent John to call people to (Lk 3:3) “repent for the forgiveness of sins.”

Now, repent is a Bible word. It means to turn around 180 degrees. You were moving along in life, headed away from God and now He is calling you to turn around and head toward Him. Well, God sent John to call people to repent – to stop living for themselves and live for Him instead.

That message resonated with a lot of people, and they responded by asking John to baptize them, signifying a clean break from the past, a moment, set in time, to mark their desire to be someone different. It was a baptism of repentance.

But John also announced that salvation would come. God was going to send the Messiah, the Christ, to atone for all the wrong we have done – it's good that you recognize your wrong, it's good that you want to change, but what about all the spiritual debt you've racked up in the past – what's supposed to happen with that? The answer: God would send someone to pay for it.

So, again, before anyone knew who Jesus was, people heard and responded to this message from John. And now Paul has run into a small group of them and he realizes they only know the first half of the story, so he explains the rest to them:

4 Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

Paul tells them – you know the Messiah, the Christ, that John said would come? Well, He did, and His name was Jesus. Let me tell you more about Him... and no doubt Paul shared with them all the things he knew about who Jesus was and what He had done and what it all meant, including Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit. And these men said, that's great news! We receive that, we believe that.

5 When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. 7 Now the men were about twelve in all.

This experience probably sounds familiar to those of you who have been with us through the whole study in Acts. You remember something similar happening in Acts 2 at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the early Christians for the first time and they praised God in foreign languages. We saw the Spirit poured out on the Samaritans in Acts 8 when Peter and John prayed for them. And then you saw it again in Acts 10 when Cornelius, the Roman Centurion received the gospel.

But all of these miraculous events, all these descriptions of the Holy Spirit coming upon people can create some confusion for us today, because it leads us to ask – is this what we should expect? Is this what it should look like when people are saved today?

You have people who read the book of Acts and they're good people, they love God, they take the Bible seriously, and they see all these times when people experienced a second baptism, had a miraculous encounter with the Holy Spirit, and they say, OK, that's what we should expect today, that's normal.

And so, you get some people who say there are two baptisms. There is a baptism of salvation with water, but then, after that, or perhaps concurrent with that, there is a baptism of fire, a baptism of the Holy Spirit that gives you power. And so they advocate for what is, essentially, two-tier Christianity.

It's almost like you have the varsity and the JV teams. The major and the minor leagues. You have salvation, you have Jesus, that's great, but do you have the baptism of the Holy Spirit? And usually, it's the baptism of the Holy Spirit as evidenced by speaking in tongues.

And if you run in these circles there can be a lot of frustration and guilt and shame because you want to make it into the big leagues, you want the extra bonus, you want the deeper life, you're crying out in your heart, yes, God, yes, more of You!

But you're expecting to see that desire answered in a very specific way and so you come forward at church or at the prayer meeting and you ask God to baptize you with the Holy Spirit and people lay hands on you and you pray and maybe nothing happens. You don't start speaking tongues like we see here in Acts.

So you ask: what happened? Did you do it wrong? Didn't you have enough faith? Does God just not like you? Maybe He's not in the mood today? Or maybe there's sin in your life and you need to deal with that first?

There's all this confusion and disappointment because you wanted more of God, you wanted to make yourself more available to God, but you were told, or you expected, that to result in a very specific experience like you see in Scripture, and if the experience doesn't come you think you've failed.

You're looking at the book of Acts as more of an instruction manual than a history book.

I want to suggest a different interpretation for you, one that says everything you see in Scripture is real, and God never changes, so yes, He can do all the things you see in Scripture today, but it might not look exactly the same or it might not happen exactly the same way for everyone.

So let's talk for a minute about what is true for everyone, regardless of your experience, what is true about the relationship between us and the Holy Spirit? Well, you need to know there are two aspects to our relationship with the Spirit. We have spoken about this several times as we move through the book. The first aspect is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit – before the crucifixion, in John 14, Jesus told the disciples the Spirit was *with* them, but He would be *in* them – He was referring to what would happen after the resurrection.

So for Christians today, the Bible is very, very, clear about this, when you are saved, you are born again, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside you, you are sealed forever for salvation, and He will never leave you or forsake you. God will not abandon you. Even when you feel totally, completely alone in this world, if you are saved, really and truly saved, if you have sworn your allegiance to King Jesus and asked for forgiveness of all your past rebellion, then God is with you – the Holy Spirit is within you and that will not change.

But Jesus also told the disciples that the Spirit would come upon them, they would receive supernatural power. He spoke about this happening in two ways – He said in John 7 the Spirit would overflow from within us – rivers of living water pouring out the lives of

believers, and He said in Acts 1:8 and other places that the Spirit would come upon us, giving us power to do the work He has called us to do.

We see this happen in different ways throughout the book of Acts but the basic purpose is always the same – God is glorified and/or people are helped by the external evidence of God at work within you.

Sometimes it's referred to as being filled with the Spirit, sometimes it's referred to as being baptized in the Spirit, sometimes it's referred to as the Holy Spirit coming upon you - all the different terminology has caused Christians some confusion through the ages, so I want to cut through the vocabulary and talk about the core of the issue by asking: do you, or have you, experienced this?

Friends, this is one of the reasons why we talk so much about being increasingly available to God. We're not saying *do increasingly more work for God*. We're saying make yourself increasingly available *for Him to work through you*. Present yourself to God as a tool for His use – ask Him to pick you up and use you, whatever form that might take, whatever it may look like. It might be spectacular or it might be mundane, but can you say, that as time goes by, you're seeking to be more and more useful to God *as* you rely on Him to direct your life and give you the spiritual strength to do the things He is calling you to do?

Is the Holy Spirit the fuel that runs the engine of your life? Or, are you trying to live on your own? There should be moments in your life that you look back on and say God was definitely using you, and you should be looking forward to the next time He'll do the same. But, you should also cultivate an attitude of dependence that says God, I don't even want to try to make it through a 'normal' day on my own – I want to run on your power in every area of my life, every day of my life.

Friends, you need Jesus for salvation and you need the Holy Spirit for strength. There is no way you can do what God is calling you to do without Him. There is no way you can live or serve in the way that God desires without regularly engaging with the Holy Spirit.

In fact, in just a moment we'll see what happens when some people try to imitate what God is doing through Paul without having the Holy Spirit themselves. But first, we get this quick description of the ministry in Ephesus:

**Acts 19:8** And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.

Now, can I ask you to just make quick note of that? Even when spectacular miracles are happening, the main focus of Paul's ministry is to reason from the Scriptures. There is an emphasis on both Christian experience and Christian education in Acts. We are completely open to miraculous events, we hope for them, we expect them, but we are also anchored in the Word – we love God with our mind, not just because we had a mystical experience.

**9** But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way

before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. 10 And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia [the Roman province, not the continent] heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

11 Now God worked unusual [extraordinary] miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.

13 Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." 14 Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so.

Exorcists were not uncommon in these days. Archeologists have discovered magical papyri from Ancient Rome. There is a finding called the Paris collection that includes spells used by ancient exorcists and they actually cite the name of Jesus. There's even one that speaks of Jesus as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Son of the Father.<sup>1</sup>

These were the kind of spells or incantations the Sons of Sceva tried to use. They didn't believe in Jesus for personal salvation, but they were willing to add His name to the mix if the tools they had weren't working. But here's the problem: they were trying to copy the work of God, without the power of God, and it didn't go so well for them:

15 And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?"

16 Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

They couldn't achieve the same results as Paul because they weren't plugged into the Holy Spirit. They knew the name of Paul and the name of Jesus, but they didn't actually know Jesus personally. They didn't understand that it wasn't just the way Paul prayed or the things he did, it was the power of the Holy Spirit flowing through him that produced miracles.

Here's why this is SO important for you to know – we are still tempted to think we can copy what we see happening with other people and get the same results. And, so, we read an article, watch a show or a video, hear a podcast or speaker and think, OK – that's the recipe – that's what I have to do for my life and my problems and that will fix things. After all, it worked for them.

But friends, are you going to try to do that in your own strength? Or, are you being led by the Holy Spirit? Are you being empowered by the Holy Spirit? Don't just copycat other people. Let God direct you and let Him give you strength.

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<sup>1</sup> Polhill, 403.

When you neglect a constant, ongoing, present tense relationship with God and try to follow some recipe or pattern that someone else is using you are back at religion instead of relationship and you no longer enjoy what is distinct about Christianity.

You must have a personal, vibrant, ongoing, relationship with God in order to be effective in life and ministry and that all happens as the Holy Spirit overflows from within you and comes upon you – as you do the work of God through the power of God, as internal truth becomes externally visible.

Growth and change will be evident in your life and you will have an impact on others, look at these next verses:

**Acts 19:17** This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. 18 And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. 19 Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned *them* in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and *it* totaled fifty thousand *pieces* of silver. 20 So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

As God is using Paul and doing amazing things through him, look at the effect it has. Many others are saved, the body of Christ continues to grow, and the Holy Spirit begins working on some of these new believers – former magicians are now burning their books.

All of which reinforces what we said earlier – there should be inward and outward evidence of your relationship with God. There should be something within you, something personal and private. But what’s happening on the inside should also be evident on the outside - internal purification produces public results as the Spirit overflows or comes upon you.

So, let’s ask a very practical question – is there anything you need to get rid of as a result of following Christ? Are there things in your life that need to go? Are you willing to let God do an inventory of your life and speak to you about things?

As you consider that, let’s be real: there was a cost involved with what these people did – books were expensive in the ancient world, they had to be printed by hand. And books about magic were very expensive because they could teach you how to earn your living from the knowledge they contained.

Luke estimates the value of the books at 50,000 pieces of silver and a piece of silver was roughly equivalent to a laborer’s daily wage, so you’re looking at a serious amount of money here – 137 years of day labor - that just went up in smoke. And there might be a part of you that says, why not just sell it and recoup the value?

Well, think about it – if God is calling you to get rid of something, is it the kind of thing that is going to be helpful to anyone else, or are you just going to be helping them to wander farther away from God too?

I'll tell you a quick story of personal experience here. Many years ago I had a pretty substantial CD collection. This was at the time when I was living for myself instead of God and I actually had a job working on Friday and Saturday nights as the DJ at the club on base in Japan using all my own music.

But when God took hold of my life, I had this strong sense that He was calling me to get rid of most of that music because it was filling my head and heart with ideas and images that actually went against the life that He was calling me live – it wasn't the kind of stuff that I could say, Hey Jesus, check this one out – you'll love this, just ignore a couple of the words or the chorus, or whatever.

So, I knew God was prompting me to get rid of it – it wasn't going to help me become the man God wanted me to be, in fact, it was actually holding me back and filling me with wrong ideas and values. But, I knew I had spent a lot of money on it, and I thought, well, let me sell it and then I can use the money to buy new stuff. But the Holy Spirit was telling me, don't do that, if it's not good for you, it's not good for others.

Well, I ignored the Spirit and took several milk crates full of CDs down to the local music store where the guy went through all my stuff and offered me like \$30. I was stunned and I said, no thanks, picked up all my stuff, brought it home and took it straight to the dumpster and God said, now why was that so hard? And I said, I'm sorry, would You please forgive me for once again thinking my ways are better than Yours?

Friends – what is God telling you needs to go?

I'm not going to stand up here and give you a list: you have to do this, you can't do that. You need to get rid of X, Y, and Z or you're not a good Christian. We're not going to do that, but I am going to press on you and ask: is there anything God wants you to give up? Is there anything that is holding you back? Is there anything you need to get rid of for the sake of following Jesus? Do you trust Him enough to ask the question and are you willing to obey, even if it costs you?

But I also want to ask you this: if you let God take things out of your life, what might He replace them with? Do you think He wants to hurt you or bless you?

Friends, it really all comes down to this question: are you surrendered to God and His plans?

That begins with a moment of salvation – has there ever been a time when you specifically said to God – I have been living for myself and not for You. I have been in rebellion against You, or I have ignored You, and it was wrong and I am sorry. Will you please forgive me through the sacrifice of Jesus?

Has there even been a time when you said, God, I need to be saved? If not, you can do that right now, seated right there where you are – have that conversation with God. He wants to have it with you.

But for those of you who have done that, have you continued to grow spiritually?

Are you more of the boy or girl, man or woman, that God wants you to be than you were last year? Spiritually speaking, are you a toddler, a teen, or a mature believer? Are you getting rid of the things that hold you back? Are you strengthened in the Spirit?

Listen to this quote from an old Baptist pastor who trained at Spurgeon's College and later pastored his famous church in London. Speaking about being available to God He said:

“All Christians have eternal life; not all Christians have abundant life. There can be life without health; there can be movement without any progress; there may be war, but defeat. We may serve, but never succeed. We may try, but never triumph, and the difference all along the line is the difference between possessing life and experiencing life more abundant. This abundant life is simply the fullness of life in Jesus Christ made possible by His death and resurrection, and made real by the incoming of His Spirit. That is abundant life. The trouble with so many of us is that we are on the right side of Easter but the wrong side of Pentecost, the right side of pardon, but the wrong side of power.”

I want to encourage you to take a moment now and ask God to use you, ask Him to empower you, ask Him to help you become the man or woman that He wants you to be, the father or mother, the husband or wife. You're not asking Him to help you do what you want to do, you're not asking Him to give you a superpower so you can reach your own goals, you're surrendering yourself as raw material for His use.

You're telling Him, God, I'll do whatever You want me to do, I'll go wherever You send me, I'll say whatever You tell me, as long as You give me strength, as long as you are the engine of my life. Tell God that you can't do this without Him and that you want Him to lead you and empower you. It's not enough to have a baptism of repentance, the baptism of John, you need the full gospel – you need to turn from your sin, but you need to turn toward Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit, and then, you need to let Him have His way in and through you.

Let's pray.