

The Gift of the Holy Spirit Today

Chapter Five: Reception

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The Holy Spirit is given to those who believe in Jesus Christ. From all that has been said about the Holy Spirit being the Spirit of the exalted Lord and given for the primary purpose of bearing witness to Christ, it is apparent that there can be no gift of the Holy Spirit except to those who believe in Him and are thereby called to be His witnesses. Through those who believe, Christ carries forward His ministry in word and deed.

Now it is important to note two matters: the *indispensability* and the *dynamics* of this faith in Jesus Christ in relation to the gift of the Holy Spirit. Let us consider these in turn.

It is important first to emphasize the matter of indispensability because of the possible misapprehension that the Holy Spirit may be received without such a faith in Jesus Christ. There have been those who, desiring no relationship to Christ, no faith in Him, would still like to receive the Holy Spirit in the sense of having some kind of inward experience of the fullness of God. For such persons faith in Christ is viewed as irrelevant, even misdirected, since what they seek is an immediacy and unity of the divine Spirit with the human spirit. Christ may point the way to such a mystical union of God and man, but He himself is viewed as not essential to such an achievement. From the truly Christian perspective, however, all immediacy with God is a “mediated immediacy”¹ wherein Christ alone can effect the unity of the infinite God and finite man.

Faith in Jesus Christ becomes all the more important with the realization that the barrier to the reception of the Spirit is not only human finitude but also human sin. Man is totally guilty, and it is only by belief in Jesus Christ that he can receive forgiveness. The wonder of the gospel, the Good News, is that there is cleansing and pardon of sins in the name of Jesus Christ. Man may truly repent and receive forgiveness and become a new creature in Christ.

This faith in Jesus Christ is personally oriented. It is directed to Him as the one who lived, died and rose again from the dead. Through His death and resurrection He has made forgiveness and new life a glorious reality. This reality may be entered into by faith in Him, by faith in His name.

It is this faith, this kind of believing in Jesus Christ, that is indispensable to receiving the Holy Spirit.² It is, therefore, pointless to talk about the reception of the Holy Spirit except against this background.

That believing in Jesus Christ is indispensable to the reception of the Holy Spirit is apparent in all the relevant narratives in the book of Acts. Three illustrations may suffice.

Peter speaks at Caesarea to the centurion and his household, beginning with words in general about God, how He “shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34-35). From there on Peter proclaims Jesus Christ: His life, death and resurrection, and then focuses on the need for faith in Him to receive forgiveness: “To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (10:43). Then it was that the Holy Spirit “fell on all who heard the word” (10:44), the word which set forth Christ and called for faith in Him. It was to those believing in Jesus, and receiving forgiveness through Him, that the Holy Spirit was given.

Philip at Samaria “proclaimed to them the Christ” (Acts 8:5). Doubtless in this message he gave them the Good News about Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. As a result, the Samaritans came to faith, and were

baptized: “When they believed Philip as he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (8:12). Later Peter and John come from Jerusalem to communicate the Holy Spirit (8:14-17). The crucial background undoubtedly was the Samaritans’ faith³ which put them in a position to receive the Holy Spirit. Believing in Christ, the Samaritans were ready for the Holy Spirit to be given.

Before the Ephesians received the gift of the Holy Spirit Paul proclaimed Jesus Christ. He reminded them that “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is Jesus” (Acts 19:4). Thereafter, “on hearing this” (19:5) the Ephesians were baptized “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Paul laid his hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Unmistakably, the critical matter was the Ephesians believing in Jesus: it was the hearing of faith, as is further evidenced personally by their baptism in Jesus’ name. Thus firm in their faith, the Ephesians were ready to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁴

Thus it is apparent that the Holy Spirit is given only to those who believe in Jesus Christ. Believing in Him—not an idea or a doctrine, but in His reality as the living Lord—is shown to be the critical and indispensable matter. It is not a belief directed to the Holy Spirit⁵ but to Jesus Christ in whom is forgiveness of sins. So did the disciples at Pentecost believe, and likewise did Saul of Tarsus. The focus is Christ, who makes possible the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁶

We now turn, secondly, to the *dynamics* of that faith in Christ wherein the Holy Spirit is received. It is important to recognize at the outset that faith is a dynamic, moving reality. Though its object, Jesus Christ, is the fixed and focal point, faith may well be in process. It is not a static, once-for-all thing, but may develop or increase under the impact of Jesus Christ. Indeed, all who believe are called upon to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18), and thus faith may all the more be strengthened.⁷

This does not mean that the first moment of faith lacks genuineness or significance. Quite the contrary, for initial faith directed to Jesus is the moment of realizing the marvel of forgiveness of sins and new life in His name. Hence, entrance upon the way of faith is far more important than anything that may happen thereafter. This cannot be overemphasized.

Now we may proceed to speak of faith in movement, faith in process. This may be a matter of a deepening of faith through further repentance and commitment wherein God’s resources of grace are all the more experienced. This may also lead to a point of spiritual breakthrough into fuller Christian life and witness.

Such an understanding of the dynamics of faith is essential to proper consideration of the reception of the Holy Spirit. *There is a certain moment in faith—whether at the outset or somewhere along the way—when the Holy Spirit may be received.* This moment may or may not coincide with the moment of receiving forgiveness of sins. It may happen shortly thereafter or days, months, even years later. Whatever the case, faith in Jesus Christ is and remains the essential matter whenever the Holy Spirit is given.

Before going further, we may turn again to the record in the book of Acts. For herein is delineated in vivid manner the gift of the Holy Spirit in relation to faith.

Let us first reflect upon the narrative about the early disciples of Jesus. The gift of the Spirit to them on the Day of Pentecost was not at the commencement of their faith in Jesus. Some hundred and twenty of them are described as “brethren” (note the language of Acts 1:15-16)—brethren of one another through a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is they who await the promised gift of the Spirit. Of the hundred and twenty, many had been with Jesus since the beginning of His ministry, the apostles as well as others, and had passed through a variety of experiences. There was the original call to discipleship, months and years of fellowship with Jesus, then a forsaking of Him at the time of His crucifixion and death, and thereafter a turning again (“conversion”)⁸ to Jesus in His risen presence. At that time, according to the Fourth Gospel, the Holy Spirit was breathed into them (John 20:22), and some fifty days later, according to the account of Luke in Acts, the Holy Spirit was poured out.⁹ Thus there was a period of some three or more years from the initial encounter to the day of the gift of the Spirit.

How long had the first disciples been believers? This is not an easy question to answer. In one sense they had been believers for some time: they had long before given up everything to follow Jesus, had done mighty works in His name, including healing and casting out of demons, and seventy of them were told by Jesus not to rejoice in the latter “but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). The statement of Jesus would suggest that their faith already was of eternal significance. According to the

Fourth Gospel, Jesus told His disciples shortly before His death, “You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you” (John 15:3). This would suggest also that Jesus’ presence and word had awakened such a response in the disciples that they had truly been made clean. Yet when it was a matter of Jesus’ words about His coming resurrection, there seemed to be little faith, and it was only His risen presence that made their faith return. Their believing had taken on a deeper and more enduring quality—and this kind of believing began with the Resurrection.

Thus we may say that when the Pentecostal event occurred, it was to many who had long known Jesus, and, despite numerous ups and downs, their faith had continued to grow. However we may evaluate the quality of their faith, it is an obvious fact that the gift of the Spirit occurred to those on the way of faith, to those believing. Indeed, a later question of Peter to the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem concerning the recent gift of the Holy Spirit to the people at Caesarea clearly implies this: “If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us [believing]¹⁰ in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11:17). On the way of faith, believing, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It is to be added that the experience of the first disciples points in the direction of what is happening among many people in our time. The gift of the Spirit to those who for some time have been walking the way of faith is being repeated frequently today. Many who have long known Jesus and come to faith in Him are now receiving the Holy Spirit in fullness.¹¹ Thus in striking manner the original Christian experience is recurring.¹²

As we move on through various other narratives that contain reference to the reception of the Spirit, it is apparent that there are other parallels to the experience of receiving the Holy Spirit along the way of faith. In the first account after Pentecost of the Holy Spirit being given, namely to the Samaritans, this occurred some days after their first coming to faith in Christ. We have already noted how Philip proclaimed the gospel and many believed. However, despite their new-found faith, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. Several days later—at least four or five days¹³—the apostles Peter and John came down from Jerusalem and “prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. . . . Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:15-17). So it was along the way of faith that the Samaritans experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The Samaritan story likewise has numerous parallels with the contemporary scene. Many, after coming to faith in Jesus Christ, have later had hands laid upon them and experienced the fullness of the Holy Spirit. And, as with the Samaritans, earnest prayer has often been the immediate background. Frequently, also, one person has been the evangelist (like Philip) to bring people to a commitment to Christ and others have been used by the Lord in ministering the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ Thus the whole process has occurred over a period of time from initial faith to the reception of the Holy Spirit.

We turn next to the account of Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9:1-19. There is likewise a delay of several days—in this case, three—between the time Saul first encountered Jesus and the moment of his being filled with the Holy Spirit. As the narrative discloses, a voice from heaven says, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” and Saul thereupon inquires, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply is given, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.” After this encounter and the beginning of faith,¹⁵ Saul fasts and prays for three days in Damascus before a man named Ananias comes to him, and “laying his hands on him, says, ‘Brother Saul,¹⁶ the Lord Jesus . . . has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’” Thus there is a period of time—though shorter than that of the Samaritans—between the inception of faith and the reception of the Holy Spirit.

What is important to recognize for the Samaritans and Saul alike is that there are two critical moments in their experience—although there is some diversity in details¹⁷—and that it is the second moment in which they receive the Holy Spirit. This sequence of events is not unlike that of many today who have “believed” (Samaritans), have called Jesus “Lord” (Saul), but who do not receive the fullness of the Spirit until later. Also, various persons may perform different functions in relation to the total experience. There may be someone who is especially the channel for initial faith (as Philip, or the Lord Jesus himself), and another—or others—is the channel for the reception of the Spirit (as Peter, John and Ananias). There is much diversity in the way these moments on the way of faith occur.¹⁸

One further illustration of the reception of the Spirit occurring along the way of faith is that of the Ephesians in Acts 19:1-7. Paul encounters “some disciples” in Ephesus. He thereupon questions them, “Did you, [believing],¹⁹ receive the Holy Spirit?” After the Ephesians express their ignorance concerning the Holy Spirit, Paul leads them step by step from “John’s baptism,” which they had experienced, into a faith in Christ accompanied by water baptism—“On hearing this [the word about Christ] they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” The final step follows: “And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy

Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.” Here is a sequence of events, or moments, in which persons move from a very limited faith to a specific faith affirmed in water baptism, to a laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Spirit. The temporal span between the first two may have covered many years; the span between the second and third is quite brief. However viewed, there is a process of Christian faith involved, a series of nonidentical events, and once again the basic fact: the gift of the Holy Spirit occurring not at the moment of initial faith.²⁰

In regard to what happened at Ephesus, it might be instructive also to turn to Ephesians 1:13, where it is quite possible that the apostle is rehearsing in similar words the event of their reception of the Holy Spirit. The wording is: “In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed²¹ in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.” Unmistakably the Spirit promised²² is the same as that in Acts 2:39: “the promise is to you and to your children” and the same received by the Ephesians in Acts 19:6. Further, the word “sealing,” while not used as such in Acts, is contained in the idea of consecration, dedication, empowering²³ that operates all through the book. Accordingly, Acts 19 and Ephesians 1 seem to be parallel accounts, and—the point of particular relevance here—each exhibits a reception of the Spirit after faith has begun. The Ephesians in both accounts receive the promised Holy Spirit upon the way of faith.

On the contemporary scene there are numerous parallels to the Ephesian narrative in Acts 19. Many persons today have long lived in a situation of quite limited faith. Their faith may have had a little more focus on Jesus than that of the Ephesians (maybe not); there may have been a little more knowledge about the Holy Spirit (maybe not), and they may have been viewed as disciples, or Christians, in some sense—but it was all rather nebulous. Many in looking back freely recognize how limited and inadequate their earlier faith had been. Then, much like Paul with the Ephesians, someone (or perhaps more than one) came along and led them into a faith focused clearly on Jesus, perhaps also water baptism and then through additional ministry into the reception of the Holy Spirit.²⁴

Now that we have noted a number of accounts in Acts that depict the gift of the Spirit as occurring along the way of faith, one stands out particularly, bearing evidence of the Holy Spirit being given at the moment of initial faith. Hereby reference is made to the account of the Gentiles at Caesarea (Acts 10 and 11:1-18). The Apostle Peter comes to the house of the God-fearing centurion Cornelius and preaches the good news of Jesus Christ, to the effect that “every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” And “while Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word” (10:43-44). The Spirit was given coincidental with (“while”) the preaching of faith in Jesus Christ. The first moment of faith in Christ was also the very moment of their receiving the Holy Spirit. Incidentally, the fact that the Holy Spirit was given is recognized later as undeniable evidence that the Caesareans had believed. For Peter, some days thereafter appearing before the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem, tells how the Holy Spirit “fell on them just as on us at the beginning.” This was what convinced Peter’s audience of the validity of the Gentiles’ faith and salvation. At first “they were silenced” but thereafter “they glorified God saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life’” (Acts 11:15-18).

The parallel to contemporary experience is unmistakable. Many persons attest that there was no separation whatever in time between their initial faith in Jesus Christ and their reception of the Holy Spirit. Unlike others for whom their basic Christian experience occurred over a period of time, they simply came into it all at once.²⁵ This does not mean there has not been growth and development since that first moment—for there has been—but the basis for all to occur later took place at the beginning.

In reflecting on what has been said, one thing may be vigorously affirmed: it is impossible to press the operation of the Holy Spirit into a mold. Accordingly, it is the same with the shaping of basic Christian experience. Moreover, contemporary Christians with their testimonies to the variety of ways the Holy Spirit has been given clearly echo the witness of the church in its early formation. So it is that we find in the biblical record ample original testimony to what is again occurring in our time.²⁶

Endnotes

- ¹ John Baillie in *Our Knowledge of God* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939) has one of the most helpful statements along this line. See especially Chapter IV, Section 16, "A Mediated Immediacy."
- ² Michael Harper writes that "the benefits of the New Covenant include the gift of the Holy Spirit as well as the forgiveness of sins. From Pentecost onwards the Church faithfully proclaimed that Christ forgives and baptizes in the Holy Spirit. They taught that all who repent and believe are justified by faith, and that all who are justified by faith may receive the Holy Spirit by faith" (*Walk in the Spirit* [Plainfield, NJ: Logos, 1968], p. 13). It is faith—nothing else—faith in Christ, that is essential to receiving the Holy Spirit.
- ³ There is no suggestion in the narrative that there was anything lacking or defective in the Samaritans' faith. I cannot, therefore, agree with James Dunn in his book *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* wherein he claims it was only "intellectual assent to a statement or proposition" (p. 65), so that they believed Philip but did not truly believe in Christ. It was later, says Dunn, when they received the Holy Spirit, that they came "to genuine faith" (p. 67). This, I submit, is a quite inadequate reading of the text and context. "Believing Philip" surely means believing the Good News which Philip proclaimed; and undoubtedly Philip understood it that way, for he thereupon baptized the Samaritans. Would he have done this on the basis of a merely "intellectual assent"? Or was Philip perhaps misled? The question scarcely merits an answer. It is true that Simon the Magician also believed and was baptized by Philip (Acts 8:13) and later was called to repentance by Peter (Acts 8:20-21); but the text does not suggest that his earlier faith and baptism were not genuine (indeed, he asks Peter to "Pray for me to the Lord" [Acts 8:24].) The record in Acts further affirms the authenticity of the Samaritans' faith prior to their receiving the Holy Spirit in verse 14: "Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God. ..." Receiving the word of God can hardly mean anything else than true and genuine faith (cf. Acts 11:1, where the same expression, "received the word of God," is used concerning the Caesareans' faith—the genuineness of which is beyond dispute). Thus, the apostles by no means (as is also sometimes suggested) came down to Samaria to make up for a defective faith. Rather did they come to believing and baptized people to minister to them the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- ⁴ Neither the narrative about the Samaritans nor the Ephesians gives full details about the proclamation of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Neither states directly that through Jesus Christ there is forgiveness of sins. However, this is surely implied in the preaching of Christ by Philip and the testimony about Jesus by Paul. Luke, the author of Acts, quite often (as we have seen) does not include matters that are clearly implied and often have been detailed elsewhere.
- ⁵ It would be a mistake to say that faith has a second focus beyond Christ, namely, the Holy Spirit. Christian faith remains centered on Jesus Christ throughout. In Him is "every spiritual blessing" (Eph. 1:3), whether it be forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit or anything else. However, while Christian faith must always keep the focus on Christ it does also expect from Him the gift of the Holy Spirit. A failure to expect this is a less than Christ-centered faith.
- ⁶ This whole matter of faith as the essential condition for receiving the Holy Spirit—and also for the quality of life that follows—is set forth well in *Catholic Pentecostals*: ". . . if there is any one thing which most strikingly characterizes Catholic pentecostals it is not tongues or singing or prayer groups; it is that they *came to seek a renewal in the Spirit in simple faith* [italics mine], and having received the answer to their prayer they begin to walk in a newness of faith. The people involved in the charismatic renewal are basically men and women of new, richer faith" (p. 144).
- ⁷ Some of the Scriptures that depict faith as growing or increasing: Luke 17:5; 2 Cor. 10:15; Phil. 1:25; 2 Thess. 1:3.
- ⁸ One thinks of the words of Jesus to Peter just prior to the Crucifixion: "Simon, Simon, behold Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail: and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:31-32).
- ⁹ Whether the account in John 20:22 is to be understood as a preliminary or proleptic giving of the Spirit, with the full gift in Acts 2:4 or as a gift for another purpose (e.g. regeneration) than the gift at Pentecost (power for ministry) or as essentially identical with what Luke records (hence a "Johannine Pentecost") is not too important for our present consideration. Whatever position one may adopt on this matter, it is still apparent that there is a lengthy process of discipleship and faith.
- ¹⁰ Here we do not follow the RSV which has "when we believed." The RSV reading would suggest that only when the disciples believed did they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. However, the Greek word is *pisteusasín*, an aorist participle, which usually expresses action antecedent to the main verb, or, less frequently, simultaneous with it. If antecedent, the translation would be "having believed" or "after believing" (NASB) or "who believed" (KJV); if simultaneous or coincident, the translation "when we believed" (RSV) would be more satisfactory. However, the participle could contain *both* ideas, and therefore the most adequate translation would be neither the RSV "when we believed" nor the KJV "who believed" but simply "believing." This would suggest that belief had been there for some time (antecedent aorist), but rather than its being simply a past fact, it was also a continuing reality (simultaneous aorist). In other words, *on the way of faith* the Holy Spirit was poured out. F.D. Bruner, in his *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, quotes the RSV and adds, "the apostles considered Pentecost to be . . . the date of their conversion" (p. 196). Unfortunately, Bruner does not go into the Greek text which makes for other possible, and more likely, interpretations.
- ¹¹ It is sometimes said that it is improper to draw any parallel between the first disciples' experience of the Holy Spirit and Christian experience thereafter. For unlike later believers they could not have received the Holy Spirit until a

later time because the Spirit was not given until Jesus left them. To answer: while it is true that their experience was necessarily spread over a period of time—a rather extended way of faith—this should not rule out the possibility that many after them will follow a like pattern. *Unlike* the original disciples, we may receive the Holy Spirit at the initiation of faith; *like* the first disciples there may be—and often is—an extended period of time.

- ¹² E.g., see the story of Russell Bixler, a renewal leader, in *It Can Happen to Anybody* (Monroeville, PA: Whitaker Books, n.d.), especially Chapter IV, “The New Creation” and Chapter IX, “The Power Flows.” Several years of walking the way of faith as a Church of the Brethren pastor separate the two experiences. Incidentally, Dwight L. Moody’s experience of being “filled with the Holy Spirit” (supra, Chapter 4, fn. 16; see *Pneuma Review* Winter 2003, page 18) occurred fifteen years after his conversion.
- ¹³ Samaria was approximately a journey of two days from Jerusalem. So by the time the word about the Samaritans’ faith had reached Jerusalem, the apostles had met and decided to send Peter and John, and Peter and John had arrived on the scene, the minimum would have been four or five days. Quite possibly it was a few days longer, perhaps a week. The exact number of days of course is not important; clearly there was an intervening time.
- ¹⁴ An illustration of this is the case of Dr. Charles Meisgeier, university professor, whose testimony includes hearing the evangelist Billy Graham, at a Madison Square Garden meeting, whereupon “Christ became my Lord and Saviour in a real and existential way.” Years later through the ministry of Rev. Dennis Bennett, Episcopal priest, Meisgeier received the fullness of the Holy Spirit. The result—“It has been a new life for us all. There is a tremendous fulfillment in being baptized in the Holy Spirit; the Christian life goes on from there and gets better and better.” See *The Acts of the Holy Spirit Among the Presbyterians Today* (Los Angeles: Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International Publication, 1972), pp. 56-61.
- ¹⁵ In a later parallel account (Acts 22:1-16) where Paul is rehearsing this event, he states that after Jesus had designated himself “I am Jesus,” Saul asks, “What shall I do, Lord?” This would suggest Saul has entered upon the way of faith, acknowledging Jesus as Lord. I realize it can be argued that Saul is simply saying “lord” (*kurie*) in the sense of “Sir” or “Master,” hence expressing little or no faith. However, the context, including the words from heaven, “I am Jesus,” would seem to suggest more. If Christian faith begins in a personal encounter with the living Christ, Saul’s experience was hardly less than that!
- ¹⁶ Ananias’ greeting of Saul as “brother” is another recognition that Saul is already on the way of faith before the filling with the Holy Spirit.
- ¹⁷ Such as the fact that the Samaritans were baptized in water at the inception of faith and only received the Holy Spirit several days later, whereas Saul’s water baptism did not occur until after his being filled with the Holy Spirit (see 9:17-18).
- ¹⁸ For a variety of testimonies in the early stages of the Roman Catholic renewal (the late sixties, see *Catholic Pentecostals*, “Bearing Witness,” pp. 58-106; also *Catholics and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Los Angeles: FGBMFI, 1968). For Protestant testimonies see other publications of the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International on Episcopalians, Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, etc.
- ¹⁹ Again an instance of the aorist participle. The term here is *pisteusantes*, translated in KJV as “since you believed” (antecedent aorist), in RSV “when you believed” (coincident aorist). My preference again is simply “believing,” which catches up both antecedence and coincidence as a continuing reality. What is important, however, is that, regardless of the way the aorist participle is translated, there is the obvious implication that one believing may not yet have received the Holy Spirit. Initial faith is not necessarily accompanied by the gift of the Spirit. Even if it be argued that these “disciples” were not yet believers in a fully Christian sense, since it turns out they are disciples of John, the question still points up the possibility of believing without yet receiving. However, the fact that Luke describes these Ephesians, when first encountered, as “disciples”—the term regularly used in Acts for Christian believers—could imply that the way of Christian faith had already been entered upon. (See article on *ῥῆμα* by E. Schweizer in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* where he says, “In 19:1-7, Luke is telling about Christians who have not yet experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit” [Vol. VI, p. 413].)
- ²⁰ Whether one identifies the initial faith with the first or second moment, the reception of the Spirit occurred thereafter (whether years later or in immediate succession). Schweizer—in looking back over the record in Acts—writes that “Days, and in exceptional cases even weeks and years may pass before endowment with the Spirit follows faith . . .” (*op.cit.*, p.412). Though I should prefer to say “follows *initial* faith,” I believe Schweizer is undoubtedly correct in his basic statement.
- ²¹ The same aorist participle *pisteusantes* as in Acts 19:2 above. KJV translates it “after that ye believed.” It could also be translated simply as “believing.” See previous note 19.
- ²² See earlier discussion of the promise of the Spirit in Chapter 1, A. (“The Divine Promise”).
- ²³ One of the uses of “seal” in the New Testament (see Chapter 4, supra, fn. 2 and 6).
- ²⁴ Again, see the testimonies in the books mentioned in fn. 18 supra. Many examples may be found. From the nebulous and limited to the clear and full is a transition that many are making in our time.
- ²⁵ This is often the case for persons who have long been searching for reality—the “God-seekers” of the world—who upon hearing the gospel clearly for the first time and the call to a personal faith in Jesus Christ not only receive forgiveness of sins but also the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Often they have been hungering for reality in an almost desperate fashion. I think of many of the recent so-called “Jesus people,” many of whom had been involved with drugs (representing an illusory search for reality). These young people had a total experience of turning to

Christ and receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit. As an example of this see Pat King, *The Jesus People are Coming* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos, 1971), the testimony of Michael Mates, "Now I'm Free," pp. 73-92. It was estimated that, at the peak of the "Jesus movement," over 90 percent of the persons involved were charismatic, not usually by virtue of a later charismatic experience, but they became such in the initial breakthrough of Christian faith. At that very moment they became "turned on" witnesses for Jesus in the power of the Spirit. In addition to the "Jesus people," there have been many other persons, either in the church or out of it, who have long had a yearning to get beyond form and ritual into a vital experience of faith. However, no matter how much they tried to find reality, emptiness somehow remained. Then the gospel one day got through to them: a personal encounter with the living Jesus. As they experienced His reality, His forgiveness, His salvation, they also received His Spirit. The emptiness was filled, and forthwith they became fervent witnesses of the Good News.

²⁶ One sometimes hears it said that the book of Acts presents so much confusing, even inconsistent, data about the reception of the Holy Spirit, that the record is of dubious value for our contemporary situation. The truth of the matter, however, is that the variety of ways in which this is described gives firm basis and example for what is happening in our time.

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