



The Holy Spirit is a big deal in the book of Acts.

The story opens with Jesus telling his disciples “wait for the gift my Father promised (1:4).” In other words, “Don’t try to do this on your own.” In chapter two, we find the believers gathered for prayer in the upper room. As they are praying, they receive the gift of the Spirit in dramatic fashion. They boldly proclaim the message of Christ “and about three thousand were added to their number that day (2:41).”

While the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was remarkable, there is an event that takes place on a much smaller scale that is even more remarkable. Peter enters the home of Cornelius. Cornelius, of course, is a Gentile. As far as the Jewish believers were concerned Gentiles may or may not have been invited to the party, but even if they were invited to the party they would always be on the outside looking in. God has a much bigger party in mind. He has to do some major work in Peter’s heart to even get him through the door. Once inside Peter begins to share the message of Jesus and to Peter’s astonishment, “While [he] was still speaking... the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.” Peter and his companions are blown away, “the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles (10:44).”

Why are Peter and his companions blown away? Because the most coveted promise in all the Old Testament was that one day God would pour out his Spirit and renew all things. It would be like the rush of a cool river over a drought weary landscape. What God had promised he was now doing. He was pouring out his Spirit, and he was pouring out his Spirit in far more generous proportions than they had ever imagined. His gift and his invitation were for all people.

The gift of the Spirit was, is and always will be, a game changer.

Luke wants us to know that the Holy Spirit is the driving force of the church. When we lose touch with the Spirit we lose touch with everything it means to be the people of God. There is nothing we should desire more than the active presence of Christ through his Spirit in our church. Where he is

present there is life. Where he is absent there may be busyness and activity, but you will seldom find life.

Enter the church at Antioch. A church enlivened by the Holy Spirit and used by God to launch a missional movement. As we read their story, Luke makes it very clear that everything they did was energized by the Holy Spirit.

BARNABAS AND PAUL IN ANTIOCH (vv. 1-3)

¹Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ²While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

1. Prophecy and teaching are both enablements of the Holy Spirit. Prophets are enabled by the Spirit to speak a direct word from God. Teachers are enabled by the Spirit to offer spiritual insight from the Scripture.
 - a. What role did each of these play in the early church?
 - b. What role do they play in the church today?
2. What do each of these offices tell us about the importance of “God’s word” or “a word from God” to the health and vitality of the church?
3. What were the leaders doing when God spoke to them?
4. What, if anything, does this tell us about cultivating an atmosphere where we can hear from God?
5. How do you think the Holy Spirit spoke to the church?
6. What did they do immediately after hearing from the Spirit? Why is this important?

BARNABAS AND PAUL ON CYPRUS (vv. 4-12)

⁴The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. ⁵When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

⁶They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, ⁷who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of

God. ⁸But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. ⁹Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, ¹⁰“You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? ¹¹Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun.”

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹²When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

1. Why do you think Luke emphasizes that Barnabas and Paul were “sent on their way by the Holy Spirit?” What do you think this means?
2. What is the difference between “going on your own,” “being sent by a church,” and “being sent by the Holy Spirit?”
3. Why is it important they were sent by the church in Antioch?
4. Why is it important they were sent by the Holy Spirit?
5. Luke tells us, “They proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues.” What do you imagine the heart of their message was to the Jewish people?
6. How does Luke describe Sergius Paulus?
7. How does he describe Elymas?
8. How does Paul describe Elymas?
9. Why is it important that Paul is filled with the Holy Spirit before he takes on the challenge of confronting Elymas?
10. What does this tell us about some of the spiritual battles we will face?
11. What is ironic about Elymas’s punishment?
12. What do you make of the fact that it was only temporary?
13. What led Sergius Paulus to place his faith in Christ?
14. How does this fit with the way Luke described him earlier?
15. What does this passage teach us about the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of the church?
16. What does this passage teach us about how to cultivate an atmosphere where we hear and respond to the Spirit?