

# Did You Receive the Holy Spirit When You Believed?<sup>1</sup>

The story of the twelve disciples in Ephesus, told in Acts 19:1-7, raises a number of questions: Who were these people? Is this the story of the founding of the church there? Is it possible to receive Christ and not to receive the Holy Spirit? and so on. What is more, some of these questions tend to be divisive, for there are many who are strongly convinced that their's is the only position which can legitimately be held and that this section of Acts naturally supports their conclusions.

Before we examine Acts 19:1-7, it should be clearly established that Luke did not write Acts 19 — or Acts 18 for that matter. In fact he only wrote Acts. The chapter divisions and verse numbers with which we are so familiar (and the section headings that appear in some translations and which are often read as if they were part of the text!) are all additions to help readers find their way. So, if nothing else, we should ask if there is a connection between this section and what has gone before.<sup>2</sup> That does not mean, of course, that we will have all of *our* questions answered.

Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth (Acts 18:11). He began by spending time in the synagogue, trying to persuade both Jews and the Greeks who were attending the synagogue (Acts 18:4). While in Corinth he met a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who had been expelled from Rome along with the rest of the Jewish population (Acts 18:2).<sup>3</sup> They were probably already believers when Paul met them, although the text does not specify this. However, it is possible, since the Roman historian Suetonius says that the Jews were expelled 'because [they] caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus',<sup>4</sup> a pattern they were to follow in Corinth (Acts 18:12ff).

When Paul left Corinth, Priscilla and Aquila accompanied him as far as Ephesus. After staying only long enough to have a discussion with the Jews in the synagogue, Paul then proceeded to Caesarea and then Antioch, before starting another journey through Galatia and Phrygia (Acts 18:18-23).

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<sup>1</sup> This study has a narrow focus. It is not my intention to provide anything like a detailed theology of the Holy Spirit, nor am I wanting to cover again the material provided in previous studies. There is much about the Holy Spirit in the first four papers this year (2001). What is in my mind is the question of whether we really know what it is to receive the Holy Spirit. It is difficult to even raise the question, since many have already worked out an answer for themselves and are strongly committed to their own position. But I am not really interested in promoting any particular form of experience.

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the issues, see Max Turner, 'The "Spirit of Prophecy" as the power of Israel's restoration and witness' in I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (eds), *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1998, pp. 327-348; James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, SCM, London, 1970, esp. chapter VIII; *The Christ and the Spirit: Collected Essays of James D. G. Dunn, Volume 2, Pneumatology*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1998. See also the various commentaries on Acts.

<sup>3</sup> It was evidently not a long absence from Rome, for when Paul finally arrived in the city he was able to meet freely with the Jewish leaders (Acts 28:17-28). Of course, when Paul wrote to the Romans, Priscilla and Aquila were back among the believers there (Rom. 16:3-5).

<sup>4</sup> *The Twelve Caesars, Claudius*, 25, Robert Graves (trans), Penguin Classics, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1979, p. 202. 'Chrestus' may be a mistaken form of 'Christus', indicating that the Roman Jews had been disturbed by Christian preaching.

## APOLLOS

Now there came to Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures.<sup>25</sup> He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.<sup>26</sup> He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately.<sup>27</sup> And when he wished to cross over to Achaia, the believers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. On his arrival he greatly helped those who through grace had become believers,<sup>28</sup> for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus. (Acts 18:24-28)

In verses 24-26, we discover that Apollos was from Alexandria, where there was a large Jewish community. He was eloquent, well-educated concerning ‘the Way of the Lord’, presumably meaning Christianity<sup>5</sup>, and spoke accurately about Jesus. However, there are two matters which call for attention; the first is the description of him as having ‘burning enthusiasm’ (*NRSV*) or his being ‘fervent in spirit’ (*AV, RSV*). Literally this phrase is ‘being fervent in the spirit’<sup>6</sup>; however, the presence of the definite article (*the*) proves little and the translations all seem to refer this phrase to Apollos’ spirit and not to the Holy Spirit, while the commentators are divided.<sup>7</sup> If this is a reference to Apollos’ own spiritual fervour, then we may go on to assume that he was not able to speak of the Holy Spirit’s presence in the world because he had not yet discovered it himself. Perhaps that was what Priscilla and Aquila taught him? On the other hand, perhaps, as James Dunn suggests, he was already ‘aglow with the Holy Spirit’.<sup>8</sup>

The second and related matter is that Apollos ‘only knew the baptism of John’ (Acts 18:25). That means that his entrance into the things of Christianity would seem to be limited to those things anticipated by John the Baptist. It would also mean, then, that he knew about Jesus and knew many of the details of his life, death and resurrection, but possibly not that the Holy Spirit, promised by John had actually been given (see Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; cf. John 7:37-39). If that is so, then until he ‘was given further information’ (perhaps we should read, ‘experienced something of the Spirit’?) he could only pass on this limited view.

Luke does not tell us everything, but we read that when he was more aware of the Way of God, he went across to Corinth with the warm approval of the Ephesian ‘brothers’, an indication that there was a functioning church in Ephesus.

## THE EPHESIAN DISCIPLES

Why have we gone through all this about Apollos? The answer is simply that we are most likely intended to understand these Ephesian disciples as the fruit of Apollos’ early activity.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. verse 26, ‘the Way of God’.

<sup>6</sup> *zevwn tw§/ pnevmati (ze□n t□ pneumatī)* Cf. the similar phrase in Romans 12:11, where the *RSV* has ‘be aglow with *the* Spirit’. See Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*, Hendrickson, Peabody, 1994, p. 611ff.

<sup>7</sup> See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. *The Acts of the Apostles* (Anchor Bible), Doubleday, New York, 1998, p. 638f.

<sup>8</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Epworth Commentaries), Epworth Press, Peterborough, 1996, p. 250; *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, p. 88.

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. <sup>2</sup>He said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?’ They replied, ‘No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ <sup>3</sup>Then he said, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ They answered, ‘Into John’s baptism.’ <sup>4</sup>Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.’ <sup>5</sup>On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup>When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied— <sup>7</sup>altogether there were about twelve of them. (Acts 19:1-7)

My somewhat simplistic analysis of this story is as follows. While Apollos was in Corinth (and see the references to him in 1 Corinthians) Paul arrived back in Ephesus. There he found some people who called themselves ‘disciples’. This title is used in Acts to refer to Christians and that is the way Paul took it, at least at first. However, for reasons that are not given, he suspected that those whom he met had not received the Holy Spirit.

Now a disciple is someone who believes his teacher and who, therefore, learns from him.<sup>9</sup> So Paul’s question, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ is another way of saying, ‘Whose disciples are you?’ Their answer to his question focusses the problem; ‘We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit’, if nothing else, tells Paul that these disciples are not disciples of Jesus. In his own writings he shows emphatically that a person cannot belong to Christ without having received the Holy Spirit. This is what he said to the Romans:

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. (Rom. 8:9)

To the Ephesians he said this:

In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. (Eph. 1:13)

The point, then, in Acts, is that here was a group of people who evidently did not have the Spirit and yet who claimed to be disciples of Jesus. This was simply impossible. Put another way, Paul would *never* have asked a Christian if he or she had received the Spirit! No one could ever confess that Jesus is Lord apart from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3).

So what of the answer, ‘we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit’? First, we should note that, given what comes next, this is perhaps not the clearest form of the reply.<sup>10</sup> Take John 7:39 as an example of the problem. There, Jesus has promised that those who believe in him will know the wonder of rivers of living water flowing out of their inner being. But he was speaking of the Holy Spirit and John recognised that ‘*as yet there was no Spirit*, because Jesus was not yet glorified’ (John 7:39 *NRSV*). I suggest that that is actually a strange translation. Of course it is rather a literal translation, but it simply cannot be what the author intended. John has already clearly described the way that Jesus himself received the Spirit (John 1:32-33) and there has been discussion of the result of that giving in John 3:34 (‘He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure’).

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Disciple’ translates the Greek μαθητήν (*mathētās*) which is related to the verb μαθήσκω (*manthan*) ‘I learn’.

<sup>10</sup> ASV has ‘they [said] unto him, Nay, we did not so much as hear whether the Holy Spirit was [given]’. The words in brackets have been added by the translators.

What is more, anyone with any experience of the revelation given in what we now call the Old Testament would have heard of the Holy Spirit. The next question, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ is another way again of Paul saying, ‘Whose disciples are you?’ Their response must have made the penny drop: ‘Into John’s baptism’. John had promised that the Holy Spirit would be given. Therefore, if they were baptised into John’s baptism and the instruction which accompanied it was at all accurate, and Luke insists that Apollos was accurate, those who were baptised would have known that the goal of their water baptism was the baptism with the Spirit.

If these disciples were in fact disciples of John the Baptist (in whatever form<sup>11</sup>), then their answer, ‘We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit’, must mean that they have not heard that the promise has been fulfilled. Whatever they have heard about Jesus to this point, they have obviously not heard of his saving work, for had they heard and believed they would have received the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:38).

The conclusion which I reach is that these disciples were not, at that point, Christians. If a person has not received the Holy Spirit then he or she is not a believer. This is filled out in the small section which concludes the story. When Paul explained to them the full details of Jesus, they were then baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus (cf. ‘the name of Jesus the Lord and Messiah’ in Acts 2:36, 38) and as Paul laid his hands on them (in baptism?) the Holy Spirit came upon them.

I would argue, then, that the gift of the Holy Spirit is part and parcel of the gift of faith, repentance and rebirth. Paul’s question to the Ephesian disciples only re-enforces that. Similarly, when Peter heard Cornelius and his household ‘speaking in tongues and extolling God’ (Acts 10:46) he reminded his fellow Jews that this was precisely what had happened to them: ‘Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit *just as we have?*’ (Acts 10:47). Later, when recounting the events at Caesarea to the church in Judea, he said,

If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us *when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ*, who was I that I could hinder God? (Acts 11:17)

Here is the point again. When a person believes in the Lord Jesus Christ he or she simultaneously receives the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup>

## **SO WHAT IS HAPPENING?**

What does it mean to say that a person has ‘received the Holy Spirit’? Or, more specifically, what does it mean to say that *you* have received the Holy Spirit?

Before I attempt an answer to that, I would like to clarify the use of the phrase, ‘to be baptised with the Holy Spirit’. The phrase is only used six times in the New Testament, four times by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33), once by Jesus (Acts 1:5) and once with reference to Jesus (Acts 11:16). What they all have in common, actually, is the baptism by John the Baptist. Baptism with the Holy Spirit is always described as being the filling out, or completion, or whatever, of the water baptism administered by John. In fact, I suspect that the words

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<sup>11</sup> If Apollos has been their teacher, then I am suggesting that they are disciples of John the Baptist to the extent that they have adopted his teaching and the baptism that went with it, not that they believe him to be the Messiah or whatever.

<sup>12</sup> The use of the Aorist participles for ‘believed’ in both Acts 11:17 and 19:2 is expressive of action coincident with the main verbs (‘gave’ and ‘received’).

‘baptise’ and ‘baptism’ etc. are used *because* of what John did; this is what John the Baptist did — this is what Jesus will do. Where that contrast is not being made in those words, other phrases, like ‘receive the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 19:2), ‘be filled with the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 9:17), and so on, are just as appropriate.

So, those words aside, what does it mean for you and me to receive the Holy Spirit? One thing seems certain: Whatever it means, the description of the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 (and elsewhere, including Acts 19) points to a somewhat dramatic experience for the people there. Just precisely what that experience was is, perhaps, not quite as clearly described as we might prefer. But we should look at those events before we examine our own, if only because our experiences are probably quite diverse and because our understanding of them has equally probably been governed by what other people have told us anyway. But more than that, we should look at the events and other descriptions in the New Testament because they are the apostolic testimony to what took place.

Let’s begin with Acts 2. First there was the experience in the house.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.<sup>2</sup> And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.<sup>3</sup> Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.<sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (Acts 2:1-4)

Who was there? Was it the twelve only (as Acts 2:14 might be taken to suggest) or was it the one hundred and twenty mentioned in Acts 1:15? What did they hear? It was a sound *like*<sup>13</sup> the rush of a violent wind. What did they see? They saw divided tongues *as of*<sup>14</sup> fire, and each tongue of the fire rested upon one of the assembled group.<sup>15</sup> What did they do? They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke in ‘other tongues’, other languages’. Even this is not completely clear. Elsewhere in Acts and in 1 Corinthians, the only places where ‘tongues’ are mentioned, the word ‘other’ is not used, leading some to suggest that this occasion was different.<sup>16</sup> Here the languages were recognised by the crowd in the city while, in 1 Corinthians, Paul insists that an interpreter is required. However, that there are two different but similar gifts seems unlikely given that Peter later saw a parallel between this experience of ‘other tongues’ and the experience of the people in Caesarea who were ‘speaking in tongues’ (Acts 10:46-47).

Could it possibly be that Luke is describing what is essentially indescribable? What Luke is describing is absolutely amazing and the closest he can come to a definition is to say it is ‘like’ the sound of a mighty wind and ‘like’ fire. What is more, those who were filled with the Spirit at Pentecost were transformed by the experience. Their new speaking was concerning ‘God’s deeds of power’, the mighty things of God (Acts 2:11). They evidently saw what God was about in a way that transcended their previous understanding.

To whom were they speaking? Certainly the crowd which had gathered at the feast of Pentecost came from all over the world — ‘Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem’ (Acts 2:5) — but were the new believers really out preaching? If Paul’s account is any indication then we would have

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<sup>13</sup> Greek *w{sp̄er* (*h̄̄sper*).

<sup>14</sup> Greek *wJseiv* (*h̄̄sei*).

<sup>15</sup> The Greek is not easy, since the verb used is the singular *ekathisen* (*ekathisen*).

<sup>16</sup> See Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* p. 236, 239.

to say 'No'. They were telling *God* how wonderful his works were. They were speaking not to men but to God (1 Cor. 14:2). This was worship.

Exactly why they were accused of being 'filled with new wine' is not given. It seems reasonable here to assume that the charge was because of the enthusiasm with which they were praising God. It would not have been because of any loss of physical control, otherwise the commands to disciplined use of the gifts in Corinth would be pointless. No, these people had received the Holy Spirit and they had realised the magnitude of God's works and they could only express that new awareness in wonder-full worship. And, quite obviously, when Peter began to speak to the crowd, they stopped.

The assertion that people filled with the Spirit lose control is flatly contradicted by the Scriptures. Paul told the Corinthians, as we have seen, that there was to be a disciplined use of the gift of tongues (and of prophecy, too).

If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. <sup>28</sup>But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God. <sup>29</sup>Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. <sup>30</sup>If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. <sup>31</sup>For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. <sup>32</sup>And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, <sup>33</sup>for God is a God not of disorder but of peace. (1 Corinthians 14:27-33)

Part of the fruit of the Spirit is 'self-control' (Gal. 5:23), so the gifts which the Spirit distributes will hardly result in loss of control. At the same time, they will not result in timidity or cowardice either.

For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; <sup>7</sup>for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. (2 Tim. 1:6-7)<sup>17</sup>

Likewise, the Thessalonians were those who received the gospel in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much confidence (1 Thess. 1:5). This must mean with much confidence in God! Indeed, the result was the same as with those in Acts 2.

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, <sup>7</sup>so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. <sup>8</sup>For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. (1 Thess. 1:6-8).

Surely receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit was wonderful. In all the descriptions, the picture is one of delight in God and a strong desire to worship him and to tell others of him.

## O FOR A THOUSAND TONGUES?

There are many for whom speaking in tongues is almost the apex of Christian experience.<sup>18</sup> There are others, on the other hand, for whom the gift of tongues is almost anathema. So what are we to say? How normative is the experience of the

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<sup>17</sup> As to whether 'spirit' refers to Timothy's own spirit or to the Holy Spirit, see, for example, George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, (NIGTC), Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1992, p. 371.

<sup>18</sup> Some Pentecostal groups will insist that the gift of tongues is the essential evidence of the baptism with the Spirit.

people in Acts 2 for us? Or, for that matter, how normative was their experience for other believers who appear in the New Testament?

When Peter addressed the crowd at Pentecost, he told them what God had done. God had raised Jesus, whom they had crucified, from the dead and made him both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:36). At this the crowd responded with a sense of great urgency, ‘Men, brothers, what shall we do?’ (Acts 2:37), to which Peter replied:

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38).

Three thousand people responded to that instruction. So what happened to them? The answer is that we are not told that they spoke in tongues, but we are told that

they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup>Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup>All who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup>they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup>Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47).

Later on, Luke is clear that Cornelius and those with him were ‘speaking in tongues and extolling God’ (Acts 10:46) and that those in Ephesus ‘spoke in tongues and prophesied’, but these are the only ones he describes as speaking in tongues. But then he does not say that Paul did either, though Paul himself readily admits to it: ‘I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you’ (1 Cor. 14:18). But Paul also tells us that not all speak in tongues, in the same way that they are not all apostles or prophets or teachers and so on (1 Cor. 12:30). All the same, he would be quite happy if all did speak in tongues, though he does qualify that (1 Cor. 14:5).

## KNOWING THE SPIRIT

Only two of the three initial outpourings of the Holy Spirit are described as being accompanied by the gift of tongues, Pentecost and Caesarea, the giving of the Spirit to Jews and Gentiles. The other occasion was the time when Peter and John prayed for the Samaritans ‘that they might receive the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 8:16). ‘Peter and John laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit’ and, what is more, Simon the magician ‘*saw* that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands’ (Acts 8:17-18). The ability to produce that sort of powerful effect appealed to him.

We are not told what the effect was but it could be seen. And when Paul wrote to the Galatians, plainly he could assume that the reception of the Holy Spirit was a moment all could recall and understand.

The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? (Gal. 3:2)

But how many of *us* can recall that moment? Many of us have been believers from birth, brought up in Christian homes and willingly trusting in Christ from earliest memory. Others have come to Christ in more memorable ways, perhaps even more dramatic ways, but we did so without being conscious that it was the Holy Spirit’s presence that had transformed us. Of course, there are those who came to Christ with

full awareness of the Spirit's presence and power, but for many others that awareness came sometimes many years after their conversion.

For whatever reason, there are Christians who would reply to Paul's question, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' with an answer more like that of the pre-Christian Ephesian disciples, 'We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit'. Would it be wrong to suggest to them that they should ask God to show them more of himself? Would it be wrong to suggest that they might be willing to receive whatever gifts God himself may choose to give, and that they might be eager that he might fill them with his presence and power and use them in ways far beyond any previous expectations?

Would this mean speaking in tongues? Possibly, but then possibly not, though I suspect that God is far more generous than we might allow. But would it mean that we may become far more aware of the sin in our lives? Almost certainly. But would it also mean that we have a fresh understanding of the forgiveness of that sin? And would it mean that we would rise up eagerly to the command to put to death those things which are earthly in us, that we would no longer look to our own needs but to the needs of others, while putting away from us all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, being kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven us? O, Yes!

And what of our plans and programs, our expectations? How wonderful it would be to learn the meaning of Galatians 5:25, 'If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit'. That is, after all what we see in the early church.

[Paul, Silas and Timothy] went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. <sup>7</sup>When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; <sup>8</sup>so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. <sup>9</sup>During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' <sup>10</sup>When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. (Acts 16:6-10)

And even more, it is what we see in Jesus. He did nothing apart from the Holy Spirit, so why should we opt for anything less?

Are we fearful that our comfortable lives might be disturbed? And what of our cosy churches which we like to control so carefully? Might they become places where there is worship which takes up, and at the same time totally transcends, all our human patterns. It may seem like I am bribing us, but it is, in fact, the word of Jesus:

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matt 7:11)

To be filled with the Spirit, to be led by the Spirit, would be *good* because the heavenly Father only gives good gifts to those who ask him. Of course, if we persist in the sin of Adam and Eve by demanding the right to determine what is good then, yes, we will be fearful and threatened. We may even be found to be fighting against God! But how sweet to say, though the Holy Spirit, 'Jesus is Lord!' and to say it to him. 'Jesus, you are my Lord, you are our Lord, and we know that only when we are filled with your Spirit can we know you as you are.'<sup>19</sup> Then we will echo the decision of the early church, by saying, 'If it seems good to the Holy Spirit, then it seems good to us!'

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<sup>19</sup> See John 16:12-15.



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