

Did You Get It? Acts 19:1-7

To understand our scripture we must explore a few things about places and people. Our scripture takes place in the city of Ephesus, a city very much like our own. It was tense with political intrigue and prejudices, divided between affluent, ambitious persons and a needy, dehumanized underclass, and strangely hopeful about its future. The first person mentioned is a young preacher and teacher named Apollos. He was both eloquent and extremely popular. He had grown up in the city of Alexandria in Egypt. His home town was where 70 Hebrew scholars translated the Old Testament into Greek, the common language of the people of the Roman Empire. Their translation was the Bible used by Jesus and the early church. It appears from Apollos' early preaching that he knew the Old Testament and the ministry of John the Baptist, but he did not know the full ministry of Jesus Christ and how one is saved by grace and not by works of righteousness.

The second person that we meet is Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. Ephesus became Paul's base of operation during his third missionary journey. Ephesus was the home of the Temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The temple, according to its ruins, was four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens! As a commercial center, Ephesus was the leading city of the province of Asia. During Paul's time the city was a major harbor and was approaching its zenith.

When Paul arrived back in the metropolitan area of Ephesus, he met twelve men who are called "disciples" but whose lives gave evidence that something was lacking. According to Paul's writings to the Ephesians "we are in the light of the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord" (Ephesians

5:8b-10). He also instructed us to be “filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of the God” (Ephesians 5:18b-210. Paul sensed that these men did not have the witness of the Spirit in their lives. We don’t know if Paul was reacting to their lack of love, worship or how they treated their families and employees, but something was not right. Paul asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (Acts 19:2) The question was important because the witness of the Spirit is the one proof that a person has a personal relationship with God (Rom. 8:9, 16; 1 John 5:9–13), and one receives the Spirit when one believes on Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:13).

Their reply revealed the vagueness and uncertainty of their faith, because they did not even know that the Holy Spirit had been given! As disciples of John the Baptist, they knew that there was a Holy Spirit, and that the Spirit would one day baptize God’s people (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:32–33). It is possible that these men were Apollos’ early students and therefore did not fully understand what Christ had done.

Then Paul asks about their baptism. In the Book of Acts, a person’s baptismal experience is an indication of his or her spiritual experience. The fact that these men did not have the Spirit dwelling within was proof that they did not have a relationship with God based on Jesus’ sacrificial death. But they had been baptized by John’s baptism, the same baptism that the Apostles had received! (see Acts 1:21–22) These twelve men had been baptized and were seeking to be religious, but something was missing.

Paul explained to them that John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance that looked forward to the coming of the promised Messiah, while Christian baptism is a baptism that looks back to the finished work of Christ on the cross and His

victorious resurrection. John's baptism was on "the other side" of Calvary and Pentecost. It was correct for its day, but now that day was ended. The baptism of John was important to the Jews of that time (Matt. 21:23–32), but it was no longer valid for these men nor for the church today. In a sense, these twelve men were like "Old Testament believers" who were anticipating the coming of the Messiah. John's preaching was to awaken us to our own inadequacy and our deserving of condemnation at the hand of God.

So Paul explained to the men many basic truths, that their attempts to do better inevitably fails because they try in their own strength. But they, like we must come to the point when we see that through the grace of Jesus Christ our condemnation may be taken away. He explained that their efforts to do better would be strengthened by the work of the Holy Spirit, through whom they could do what they could never do themselves. Then Paul baptized them, because their first "baptism" was not truly Christian baptism.

Paul laid hands on these men before they received the Spirit. This was different from the experience of Peter with the Samaritan and the Gentile believers. By using Paul to convey the gift of the Spirit, God affirmed Paul's apostolic authority and united the Ephesian church to the other churches as well as to the "mother church" in Jerusalem. Earlier when Peter and John laid hands on the believing Samaritans, it united them to the Jerusalem church and healed a breach between Jews and Samaritans that had existed for centuries. Now the breach was healing between the Jews and the Gentiles.

So don't be frightened and considered that you didn't get or don't have the Holy Spirit. I know you are saying "no one laid hands on me." I didn't speak in tongues when I was baptized. Relax, what God did through Paul for these twelve men was not normative for the church today. We know this because it was not repeated. The people who were converted in Ephesus under Paul's ministry all

received the gift of the Holy Spirit when they trusted the Savior. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 1:13–14, and this is the pattern for us today. It is important to note that God’s pattern for today is given in Acts 10:43–48: sinners hear the Word, they believe on Jesus Christ, they receive the Spirit, and then they are baptized. Don’t be concerned if you sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit before or after your baptism, the promise is to each of us and we can’t box the Holy Spirit in. We see the Gentiles in Acts 10 did not receive the Spirit by means of water baptism or by the laying on of the Apostles’ hands (Acts 8:14–17).

Also don’t be concerned about the speaking in tongues. In Acts 19:6, we have the last instance of the gift of tongues in the Book of Acts. The believers spoke in tongues at Pentecost and praised God, and their listeners recognized these tongues as known languages (Acts 2:4–11). The Gentile believers in the house of Cornelius also spoke in tongues (Acts 10:44–46), and their experience was identical to that of the Jews in Acts 2 (see Acts 11:15). This was of historic significance since the Spirit was baptizing Jews (Acts 2) and Gentiles (Acts 10) into the body of Christ (see 1 Cor. 12:13).

Today, the gift of tongues is not an evidence of the baptism of the Spirit or the fullness of the Spirit, although many of my friends in the Apostolic and Pentecostal churches would disagree with me. Paul asked, “Do all speak with tongues?” (1 Cor. 12:30) and the Greek construction demands “no” as an answer. When Paul wrote to his Ephesian friends about the filling of the Holy Spirit, he said nothing about tongues (Eph. 5:18ff). Nowhere in Scripture are we admonished to seek a baptism of the Holy Spirit, or to speak in tongues, but we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. When we read Paul’s letter to the Ephesian church we note the many references to the Holy Spirit of God and His work in the believer. ¹

¹Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Ac 19:1

It is worth repeating that the reception of the Holy Spirit in Acts does not follow any set pattern. The Spirit came into believers before baptism (Acts 10:44), at the time of or after baptism (8:12-16; 19:6), and by the laying on of apostolic hands (8:17; 19:6). Yet Paul declared (Rom. 8:9) that anyone without the Holy Spirit is not a Christian. Obviously the Book of Acts is not to be used as a doctrinal source on how to receive the Holy Spirit.²

Are you trying hard to do and be better; maybe that was one of your new year's resolutions. But it is only by the grace of Christ and the help of the Holy Spirit that you and I can meet that challenge. Without the Holy Spirit our religion become a thing of struggle and does not become a thing of peace. We learn from the experience of the disciples in Ephesus a great truth—that without the Holy Spirit there can be no such thing as complete Christianity. Even when we see the error of our ways and repent and determine to change them we can never make the change without the help which the Spirit alone can give.³

If you lack the Holy Spirit accept Jesus as your Savior and be baptized and God has promised to give you the gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:409

³Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Acts of the Apostles*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1976 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 141