

When God's Spirit Moves

Luke 11:13; John 16:13-14a; Acts 8:9-25

As I prayed and debated what to preach on Mother's Day, what's been stirring in my heart is our need to depend on the Holy Spirit for all of life including godly motherhood.

More specifically, I've been burdened by the fact that professing Christians seem to be on two different spectrums with regard to the person and power of the Holy Spirit. There are churches that rightly believe that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead and that He resides in the bodies of all born again believers. But when it comes to His activity in our lives, little emphasis is paid to our need to depend on the Spirit to bring us to spiritual maturity and ministry.

But then there are churches on the opposite side of the spectrum. There are all kinds of whacky activities going on in some churches that are being attributed to the Holy Spirit that have no scriptural basis whatsoever. During the service, people can be seen running in a frenzy around the sanctuary, or falling backwards when the minister touches them, or laughing uncontrollably because they're supposedly "filled with the Spirit." Because of this, those on the other side rarely speak of the Holy Spirit to avoid being associated with the lunacy.

As Jim Cymbala observed, "there's a very strong pendulum swing in churches concerning the Spirit. In some places, you'll find wild, off-the-wall, unbiblical things that you could never imagine Jesus or Paul doing—people howling like some wild animal or crawling like snakes on the ground. These churches act like an insane asylum in the name of the Holy Spirit! The pendulum also swings the other way, and in some places there's no [awareness of the] Holy Spirit, and it feels like a cemetery.

If you travel around in America today, you'll find cemeteries and insane asylums. The wilder the asylum gets, the more the cemetery reacts the other way, saying, 'I don't want that wild fanaticism and emotionalism and experiential religion. We're just going to be sound in the Word.' That grieves the very one who wrote the Bible, who is the

Holy Spirit! In the middle of it all is the devil, who is trying to play us off on both sides, because *at the center of all that we are to do for God*, we need the power of the Holy Spirit judged carefully by the Word of God.”

Do you know that it was two mothers in the early 1900s who were influential in Mother’s Day becoming a National Holiday? Anna Jarvis and her daughter were political activists fighting for causes like the lack of sanitation.

Like the organization, Mothers Against Drunk Driving today, they wanted Mother’s Day to bring attention to the causes they were fighting for. In honor of these mothers, President Woodrow Wilson, in 1914, signed the legislation setting Mother's Day as the second Sunday each May.

But, as one historian noted, “Before long, however, the observance became commercialized. It came early enough to outrage Anna Jarvis, but she fought a losing battle against the florists, marketers, and other commercial interests. She died regretting that she had conceived the idea of Mother's Day in the first place.” Albert Mohler

Let me clarify that I’m not advocating that we should not have a day to honor and celebrate mothers. They deserve more than one special day. But like Anna Jarvis who cared more about a worthy cause, the best way that we can honor godly mothers is by living for the cause of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

More than mere sentimentality, godly mothers would gladly trade in all the Mothers’ Day gifts that they ever received so long as their children were authentically walking in the Spirit and living a life that honors the sacrifice of Jesus.

Godly moms may accept a fake Coach purse from their children with a smile, but when it comes to the spiritual lives of their children, they’re desperate for a real move of the Spirit that will give them a life worth living and a cause worth dying for.

Main idea: When God's Spirit moves, Jesus is magnified in our lives and ministries.

This morning we are going to examine the pseudo spirituality of Simon the magician. From Doctor Luke's account in Acts 8 of his apparent conversion, we are going to learn how to discern and seek a genuine move of the Spirit in our lives and ministries which will make a real difference for Christ in time and eternity.

*Read Acts 8:9-24

1. More than superficial amazement, the Spirit gives us a supernatural awakening.

The first point I want us to see is that more than superficial amazement, the Spirit gives us a supernatural awakening. Before Simon came to profess faith in Christ, Doctor Luke, the writer of Acts, emphasizes that many were amazed by his magic. In verses 9 through 11, Luke records, *"But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. ¹⁰ They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." ¹¹ And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic"* (Acts 8:9-11).

Specifically, what kind of magic or sorcery Simon performed, we don't know for sure. But what we do know is that his magic, which likely was demonically inspired, had people believing he was somebody great. He had great influence over the people, the poor and affluent alike. In fact, they believed that he was some kind of spiritual or religious man sent by God who possessed the power of God (v.10).

Let me add also that Simon no doubt used his demonically inspired influence for monetary gain. He was not feeding the sheep, he was fleecing the sheep.

How many of you know, we have many Simon-like charlatans today, some professing to be Christian ministers, who are making big money through their clever abilities to tell people what they want to hear. Or by deceiving people into believing that they have the power to make their lives better on earth.

Everywhere you look today you'll find these storefront spiritual advisers and Tarot card readers. The reason they're everywhere is because they're making money telling grieving, gullible or greedy people what they want to hear. They're nothing but manipulators and con-artists.

Can I tell you, the prosperity preachers and fake healers today are cut from the same cloth? And many gullible people today are amazed by these hucksters. They promise their followers health and wealth, if they apply their faith formulas, but they are the only ones getting rich off their ponzi schemes.

Why are so many people falling for a pseudo spirituality and a counterfeit Christianity?

Many today are looking for an amazing experience but they have not been awakened to the truth of God's word. They're looking for a chill or a thrill, but they do not know the living Christ. They're looking for a solution to their problems, but they've not surrendered their lives to the Lordship of Christ. They're amazed at what God can do, but they are not in awe of who God is. They want God's blessings but they don't want God to be God in their lives.

You know, there are a lot of Get-Rich-Quick Schemes that people fall for today. Often the reason people fall for them is because they have the same greed in their hearts as the scammers do. The scammers know this and they play off of it.

But the dangers of falling for a Get-Rich-Quick scheme does not only exist outside the church. As I noted already, wolves in sheep clothing have crept into churches and have led many professing Christians astray.

Another reason many professing Christians have been led astray by those peddling a prosperity gospel is that they have little or no knowledge of the word. Or they put feelings and experiences above the word of God.

Feelings are great followers, but they're terrible leaders. If you're not growing in your understanding of the word, or you're putting spiritual experiences above the authority of God's word, you will be easily deceived.

Now when Philip the evangelist, who was the real deal, came into a Samaritan town and preached the good news of Jesus, many of the Samaritans believed and were baptized. In addition, Simon, who had demonic influence over the Samaritans, also believed. But although Simon professed to believe, I want to submit to you that a careful examination of the text suggests that he did not possess saving faith.

Beginning in verse 12 we read: *"But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed."*
Acts 8:12-13

Again, we read in verse 13 that Simon believed. Did he believe in Jesus as his Savior and Lord, or as a source for miracles? I want to submit to you that Simon's faith was in the miracles that Philip performed in the name of Jesus, but not in the message of salvation in Jesus that he preached.

Concerning the Samaritan believers who were genuinely saved, their faith came through the message that they heard: *"But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women."* Acts 8:12

The following verse says Simon also believed, but then Doctor Luke emphasizes that he followed Philip and was amazed by the miracles that he performed (v.13). Simon believed, but *“even the demons believe—and shudder!”* (James 2:19)

Simon believed in the power of Jesus’ name to perform signs and wonders, but not in the person and work of Jesus to save Him from His sin. To have saving faith, one must believe in Jesus not simply as a miracle worker, but as Savior and Lord. We must turn from our self-rule and fully trust that Jesus paid our sin-debt with His blood and rose from the dead so that we might have eternal life. Saving faith is more than head knowledge; there must be heart trust.

The fact that Simon continued to lust for power over people that were set free by the gospel, suggests that he was unregenerate. This appears to be the reason why he continued with Philip who also worked great miracles. He continued with him after his baptism not because he loved Jesus and wanted to grow, but because he envied Philip’s power (Acts 8:13).

Do you know that Jesus also had those who followed Him for His miracles but not because of His message? In John 2:23-25 we read: *“Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.”* John 2:23-25

Many today are amazed by what Jesus can do. They believe that He can do miracles. They believe that He can make their lives better on this earth. But they’re not awakened to who He is, and what His mission was, namely to seek and save lost sinners.

Do you desire for your life to be under the control and influence of the Holy Spirit? Or do you only want God’s power and blessings to continue to live your life the way you want to live it? If that describes you, it could be that you are in the same boat as Simon. That is to say, you are still a slave to sin and in need of salvation.

Now, there is some debate among commentators as to whether Simon was genuinely converted. But whether he had true saving faith or not, what is absolutely clear is that he still wanted to carry on the same money-making scheme he had going on before. Except this time, he wanted the power and authority of the Apostles who were laying hands on people to receive the Holy Spirit.

This brings us to our second point:

2. More than tantalizing power, the Spirit gives His transforming presence.

When God's Spirit moves, more than tantalizing power, He gives us His transforming Presence. When Simon saw that through the laying on of the Apostles' hands the Samaritan believers received the Holy Spirit, he coveted the same authority. Beginning in verse 18, we read: *"Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."*

It's important to note that believers today receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation (Ephesians 1:13). But due to the fact that there existed a long-standing hatred between Jews and Samaritans in the first century, the delayed reception of the Holy Spirit allowed for the Apostles to come down and put their authoritative stamp of approval on the Samaritan believers being grafted into the body of Christ.

This participation by the Apostles helped to give credibility to the Samaritans before Jewish believers and thus prevented division. After the affirmation of the Apostles through the laying on of their hands, the Samaritan believers received the Holy Spirit.

Now when Simon the Sorcerer saw this, he offered the Apostles money so that he might be given this same power. But Peter rebuked him saying: *"May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21 You have neither part nor*

lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” (Acts 8:20-23).

Simon wanted the Holy Spirit so that he could continue to have power and control over people, not so that the Holy Spirit would have power and control over him. He had great power over the Samaritans through his sorcery, but after they heard the gospel and trusted Jesus, they were set free.

Consequently, Simon knew he was losing his hustle, his gravy train, his livelihood. Hence, Simon wanted power to continue to make a name for himself, but he didn't want the presence of God in his life to make the name of Jesus great.

The same is true today. Many want power from God to be influential, to make a name for themselves, or to be successful in the eyes of men. But the Spirit's presence is not given to make our name great or our church's name great, but to make Jesus much more famous—to glorify the name of Jesus.

Simon thought he could buy the power of God to gain a following, to draw a crowd, and to make others continue to believe he was this great power from God. Simon was a gifted magician and no doubt money was involved in putting together the tricks of the trade by which he amazed people.

Do you know, many church leaders today have been led to believe that if they can learn to preach inspiring messages that appeal to the felt needs of people, if they could build more modern church buildings equipped with appealing facilities for children, if they could hire themselves gifted musicians that can play the most popular songs on K-love, they could draw bigger crowds?

And the truth is money can buy amazement and amusement that can draw crowds. But money can't buy hearts being awakened to the

presence of a Holy God and the saving power of the gospel. The goal of our church gatherings is not for people to leave amazed by the great preaching or great music, but that they would leave in awe of how great a Savior is Jesus our Lord!

This bring us to our final point:

3. More than consequential regret, the Spirit gives us contrite repentance.

When God's Spirit moves, more than consequential regret. He gives us contrite repentance. Simon the magician appeared to have regretted trying to buy the power of God because of the consequences, but he was not grieved or broken over his sin in a way that produced genuine repentance towards God.

We see in our text that Peter rebukes Simon for his selfish financial proposal and calls him to repentance. But there is no indication that Simon ever truly repented. Notice Simon's response to Peter's rebuke: *"Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me"* (Acts 8:24).

Although Peter calls him to repent, rather than doing so, Simon asked Peter to pray for him so that he might not suffer the consequences of his sin. He never prayed for himself or asked God for forgiveness. There is no evidence that he wanted to change his ways or that he desired Jesus to be Lord and Savior of His life.

"Do you know, as Adrian Rogers observed, why so many churches have trouble? Because there are people who are bitter and in bondage. They've met religion, but they've never met Jesus. They've never been broken at the foot of the cross. They've never laid their pride in the dust. They've come into a church not for what they can give, but for what they can get. They've never met Jesus. The Spirit of God is not in these people. And they are trouble makers everywhere they go, because their religion has never satisfied them and it never can."

Beloved, only Jesus can satisfy? Only Jesus can set us free from sin and Satan. Only Jesus through the Spirit can make something beautiful of our lives and our church.

Earlier I shared that one of the women, Anna Jarvis, who was instrumental in Mother's Day becoming a national day of observance, wanted Mother's Day to bring attention to the social causes that she was fighting for. She was an activist for social change.

But the observance quickly became commercialized. Anna Jarvis was outraged, but she fought a losing battle against the florists, marketers, and others looking to make a buck. She died regretting that she had conceived the idea of Mother's Day in the first place.

Similarly, the Holy Spirit is grieved today by the fact that some churches either don't sense a desperate need for the Spirit to advance the cause of Christ or they've commercialized the church in the name of the Holy Spirit so that they might draw a bigger crowd.

During the earthly ministry of Jesus, he drove out those who turned the temple into a house of merchandise. And He rebuked those who commercialized the house of God saying, *"It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."* Mathew 21:13

Why is Spirit-led prayer to be a distinguishing mark of the House of God? Pastor Erroll Hulse explained, "The [regular] prayer meeting is the spiritual barometer for any local church. You can tell with a fair degree of accuracy what the church is like by the demeanor or substance of [their regular] prayer gatherings. Is there genuine evangelistic concern and heartfelt longing for the conversion of unconverted family members? If so it will be expressed in the prayers. Is there a world vision and a fervent desire for revival and the glory of our Redeemer among the nations of the world? Such a burden cannot be suppressed. Is there a heart agony about...the need for the gospel of peace among the suffering multitudes of mankind? The church prayer [gatherings] will answer that question. Intercession in the prayer [gathering] will soon reveal a loving church that cares for those

who are oppressed and weighed down with trials and burdens. Those bearing trials too painful or personal to be described in public will nevertheless find comfort in the prayer gathering, for there the Holy Spirit is especially at work.”

Remember that Simon thought he could buy the power of God, which he wanted for his own gain. When he was rebuked by Peter for such a wicked desire, he was admonished to repent and pray for forgiveness. But as far as we can tell, he didn't repent or pray. He only asked Peter to pray that he would not suffer the consequences of his sin.

Simon's problem wasn't that he wanted the power of the Holy Spirit, but that he had the wrong intentions, namely to advance his own agenda, not Christ's. And although Peter exhorted him to pray for himself, it wasn't a bad thing that he asked Peter to intercede for him. Again, the problem was that he only wanted to be delivered from negative consequences and not first from the wrong desires that led to the negative consequences.

How many of you are grateful for how the Spirit, since coming to faith in Christ, has transformed your life and continues to change you to be all that God saved you to be? How many of you want to see a genuine move of the Spirit of God that leads to people truly being broken over their sin and that awakens them to their continual need for Jesus?

Conclusion

What did Jesus have in mind when He urged His disciples to continually ask for the Holy Spirit in Luke 11:13? He later explained to His disciples, “when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” and “He will glorify me” (John 16:13-14).

May we continually seek for the Spirit to guide us in the way we ought to go and to give us the divine strength to know Jesus and make Him known in all that we say and do.

Discussion Guide: When God's Spirit Moves

Luke 11:13; John 16:13-14a; Acts 8:9-25

Main idea: When God's Spirit moves, Jesus is magnified in our lives and ministries.

Review

What gave Simon the magician (sorcerer) such power and influence over people? Why was this influence dangerous for the Samaritans? Acts 8:9-11

What is the primary ministry of the Holy Spirit? (John 16:13-14)

Assess

Everywhere you look today you'll find storefront spiritual advisers and Tarot card readers. The prosperity preachers and fake healers today are cut from the same cloth. Why are so many people falling for a pseudo spirituality and a counterfeit Christianity?

Concerning the Samaritan believers who were genuinely saved, their faith came through the message that they heard: *"But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women"* (Acts 8:12). The following verse says Simon also believed, but then Doctor Luke emphasizes that he followed Philip and was amazed by the miracles that he performed (v.13).

There is some debate among commentators as to whether Simon was genuinely converted. Can a person "believe" and still be unregenerate? (John 2:23-24). What evidence do you see in the text for Simon being genuinely converted? What evidence do you see from the text for him not being truly born again?

Why did Simon want the same authority that the Apostles had so that anyone on whom he laid his hand on may receive the Holy Spirit? (Acts 8:18)

What is the right motivation for praying for the power of the Spirit in your life? What is a wrong motivation?

Why was Simon's wrong motives for wanting the power of the Spirit such a grievous sin? (Acts 8:20-23)

How are some professing believers today acting like Simon?

After being rebuked for his sin, do you see evidence in the text that Simon genuinely repented? What are the marks of true repentance? (Acts 8:20-24)

During the earthly ministry of Jesus, He drove out those who turned the temple into a house of merchandise. And He rebuked those who commercialized the house of God saying, *"It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."* (Mathew 21:13) Why is Spirit-led prayer to be a distinguishing mark of the House of God?

Application

Do you know the ministry of the Spirit in your life? How are you grateful for how the Spirit, since coming to faith in Christ, has transformed your life and continues to change you?

Simon wasn't wrong for wanting to know the power of the Spirit. Rather, he had the wrong motivation. Do you need to confess any wrong motives for what you're seeking God for? (James 4:1-3)

How do you need to seek for the Spirit to work in you and through you? What's your motivation (so that) for asking? (Luke 11:13)