

The Believable Christian

By Paris Reidhead*

Will you turn, please, to Acts, Chapter 8, and I shall read beginning with verse 5, and through verse 25. I want you to see the background of this important portion. We are talking about fellowship in regard to the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:5-25:

“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. ⁶And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. ⁷For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. ⁸And there was great joy in that city. ⁹But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: ¹⁰To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. ¹¹And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. ¹²But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. ¹⁴Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: ¹⁵Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: ¹⁶(For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) ¹⁷Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. ¹⁸And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, ¹⁹Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. ²⁰But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. ²¹Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. ²²Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. ²³For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. ²⁴Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the LORD for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me. ²⁵And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.”

Now the matter of fellowship is seen very clearly. We use this word, *koinonea*, because it is commonly understood as fellowship. But you recognize the same word is translated communion. It is translated sharing — not in the New Testament, but would be properly by us, participation. It is a word that has reference to the fact that there is something that was in common, something that was of meaning and value to them all. And it is this that we should see in the message that we trust is going to come clearly to your heart. And that is that there is fellowship in the whole of the Gospel, not just fellowship as far as the Christians are concerned, but as Christians.

This is exactly what Philip was doing. He went down to the city of Samaria, this city that was divided off from the rest of the Jews and worshipped in the mountain where the woman at the well testified that her fathers had instructed her to worship, this people who were proud and arrogant in many respects, thinking themselves far superior to the Jew, the Samaritans — called by the Jews Samaritan dogs. And so he has gone down into this city of Samaria. And in a sense you see they were recognized to be Jews, but why they had not seen the difference between them probably goes back to the beginning of Samaria when the northern ten tribes divided from the southern two. But at any rate, there was apparently no prejudice, no racial prejudice that we find a little later - previously when Peter has gone into the house of Cornelius. They were nevertheless a despised people to whom Philip has come. And so he has preached Christ unto them. He has proclaimed the Lord Jesus Christ to be the answer to all of the prophecies of the Old Testament. He has declared that the Lord Jesus Christ, this one born of a virgin, who lived a sinless life, who died an atoning death, and had been gloriously raised from the dead, was none other than the long awaited Messiah. He preached Christ. He said the answer to their guilty conscience was the sacrifice of Christ, the answer to their needy hearts was the Person and presence of Christ. He preached Christ to them.

How easy it is for one to preach some aspect of truth, some principle, and yet fail to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ. All who were entrusted with this manner of sacred ministry are brought again and again to check after they have done what they thought

was their best works. Did we preach Christ today? Did we exalt Him? Or were we simply presenting some aspect of truth? It is the preaching of Christ, the setting forth of the Lord Jesus that God has promised to bless, the exalting the uplifting of His Son. This is what you are to do in your witness.

How frequently I find when lay people — and I use the word reluctantly, to distinguish from those charged with formal instruction — but how frequently people in the congregation will say something like this: Come to our church. We would love to have you come to our church. Now I suppose they think they are witnessing. And it is not that we do not want them to come, mind you. But this is not preaching Christ. Again they will say, Come and hear our preacher. And this is what we want to have happen. But it is not preaching Christ. You are as responsible to preach Christ to your neighbors and those whom you can meet as was Philip. He was a deacon. He was charged with the responsibility of being a witness for the Lord Jesus. The difference perhaps is this, that Philip was living in the context of vital, vigorous, New Testament Christianity, and we are a considerable distance from that. And he was living in the period of church history when being filled with the Spirit was the normal condition of a believer, and I am afraid we are some distance from that historically. And so there were many things that Philip had, assets, that you do not have. On the other hand, he did not have a New Testament. He did not have church history. He did not have the doctrinal opportunities that you have of understanding the truth systematically. You have the same privilege of being filled with the Spirit; you have the same opportunity to know God as he had. I wonder if this is true? Are we preaching Christ? that is, in our daily life.

Of course, you understand from what we have said in the past, that you are not to use the employer's time to do that. I think that one of the business men here in the city has a good point when he says, "We have a foundation for which we send missionaries, but we do wish that they would not do missionary work after they have punched the time clock. The missionary work we ask them to do here is to live Christ. The preaching of Christ we desire that they should do on their own time." And there is a sense in which this is absolutely true, and right and proper. You ought to so live, your whole conduct and bearing and demeanor should be such that there is going to be a question raised, "What makes you different? Why are you like you are?" And then you can say, "Well look. Have dinner with me, or come to my home, or let me come to your home, and we will talk about this." But do you preach Christ. That is, are you prepared in mind and heart, and Spirit, to recognize that it is your responsibility, not just tell about somebody who can do this, but actually to do it. Your responsibility is to preach Christ. And when you become the kind of a Christian God wants you to be, and the church becomes the kind of a church God wants it to be, the fellowship that believers have together, being nourished in the Word, worshipping the Lord, knowing that common shared life of Christ, is all to have its effect in their conduct when they return to their homes, their attitude when they work in the community, and the words that they speak.

"After that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, ye shall be witnesses unto Me." (Acts 1:8) This was the geometrical increase of the Church. Unfortunately, in the 20th century, we have changed it from geometry to arithmetic. We have a preacher, and we add to him some followers, and out of that we will maybe in a generation get two or three more preachers, that go and open churches. But the followers remain still about the same. But in the New Testament Paul won somebody to the Lord, he introduced this one whom he led to the Lord in a similar relationship to that which he enjoyed, and then there were in effect two Pauls, and each won another, so there were four Pauls, and each won another and there were 8 Pauls, and so it was a geometrical increase squaring itself, constantly increasing in this fashion. And so Philip is one of the deacons. He has gone down to Samaria and he has preached Christ; because he has known the Lord, because he is available to the Lord, because he is walking in the Spirit, the consequences are these, that there will be not only a word declared but a demonstration given, Hearing and seeing the miracles that he did. And so there was great joy in that city. We read down in verse 12 a most interesting statement: But when they believed Philip...

We usually say, "When they believed the Lord." But here it says, "When they believed Philip." And you understand this; they have to believe you before they are going to believe Him. Is your life believable? Is your attitude believable? Is your prayer life believable? These are questions that all of us must continue to ask when we are brought face to face with such a statement as this. Philip preached the things concerning the kingdom of God, the constitution of the kingdom, the laws of the kingdom, the obligations to the King and the kingdom, and the responsibilities that they had because they were part of the kingdom. As they were told by Philip things concerning the kingdom of God, and then as he preached unto them the name of Jesus Christ as the

sovereign of the kingdom, as the ruler of the kingdom, they believed Philip. And I have told you again, and remind you of it, because of its striking importance, the word believe comes from the ancient Anglo-Saxon word, *luf* or *lief* which means in accordance with, and so to believe Philip was to turn from the way they were going and walk along with Philip, walk along in accordance with him, walk along in accordance with what was said, the laws of the kingdom, the constitution of the kingdom, and the privileges and responsibilities of the kingdom, and under the control of the King. And so they believed him. They decided that this is the way they would go. They opened their hearts to the testimony concerning Christ. They received Him, and to signify their cutting off with the old, and beginning with the new, they were baptized.

Baptism was a clear cut decision. How often we find in foreign missionary work that people will be believers. They want to be secret believers. But when it comes to the matter of baptism, my how reluctant they are, because you see this is going to mean that they will be ostracized from their families, and excluded from their culture and privileges that they have enjoyed. This is extremely lonely. And now we find, however, that somewhat of a whole community is coming to Christ. There has been a great invasion of the Gospel, and thus they are baptized, cutting them off from the past, isolating them now under the sovereignty of Christ.

Notice something else. They were baptized, both men and women. And now we have in this fellowship the fact that there is no distinction. Certainly, if they have heard, if they have believed, if they have been willing to break with the past, and submit to the sovereignty of Christ, they have a right to share in prayer, they have a right to share in testimony and in the fellowship. And thus we have this word, both men and women. Perhaps there was a breaking down of some wall of division in Samaria. But at least it was important to the Spirit of God for us to understand that both men and women took their stand for the Lord Jesus and signified it by baptism.

Now according to our theology, as I understand it, and hold it, and believe it, when they heard Christ preached, when they believed Philip, when they received the message that he gave, and the Sovereign whom he presented, when they followed Him in baptism, they were born of God. They had already partaken of His life. You remember that when I gave you the little outline, I said that the Spirit of God presents Christ to the sinner, and thus it is the work of the Spirit to enable Philip to preach. It is the work of the Spirit to perform these miracles, delivering from the power of demons, and healing those that were palsied and lame. It was the work of the Spirit to persuade both men and women to break with all the sins of their day and generation, turn their back on their culture, isolate themselves from their community, and follow the Lord Jesus Christ in baptism. We understand that they were born again, that they were saved people.

In Romans, the 8th Chapter, we read, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His," and so these are His. And we will have to assume they have the Spirit. You see, being born of the Spirit is essential for one to be baptized. We firmly hold that baptism is an evidence and a testimony to regeneration, and it is the setting for of one's, or the affirmation of one's experience with the Lord. It is called by us "believer's baptism," for we feel only a believer is entitled to follow the Lord in baptism. It has no reference to the unsaved.

Therefore, when Philip baptized this company, he must have been satisfied that they were genuine in their faith. Oh, there is one problem, Simon as we have seen, read, is a problem. Peter, with discernment, gifts of the Spirit, discovered that Simon was in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. But this is the only one. And I think it is striking that when Peter and John came down and dealt with this company that had been baptized, there was only one in whom they found question, and reason for uncertainty. Now, since this is the case, it is obvious to me in the light of Scripture, that here were a people that had been born again; here were a people that were passed from death to life. These were children of God through faith in Christ that Philip baptized. They were born of the Spirit.

But you see, you are born of the Spirit, but you are not born full of the Spirit. And so there was a great concern. Nor is there anything said about the Holy Spirit. He preached unto them the name of Jesus Christ. He preached unto them the kingdom of God. He preached Christ. For there is no necessity whatever, you must understand this, no necessity whatever for one to put faith in the Holy Spirit in order to be born of God. Faith is in Christ. We are to preach Christ. We are to preach truly concerning the kingdom, and Christ as the King. This is to be our continuing ministry.

But that ministry is only affected by the Holy Spirit. But we do not need to exact faith from people in the Holy Spirit. This is not asked. And so up until now there has been no mention made of the Holy Spirit. We are born of the Spirit. There is evidence of it that satisfied Philip. There is evidence that satisfies Peter and John. But no mention made of the Holy Spirit. But He is in them if they are His, for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, they are none of His. So we are caught in a dilemma. In a sense we are, but there is not any if you will stay with me for just a moment.

Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John. Here we find fellowship. Here we find not only Philip sharing, but the whole of the company of the leaders of the church, those who were entrusted by the Lord with responsibility, entered into this. They were vitally concerned about it. And they realized that there was the possibility that this first church, among what we might call Gentiles, would have to be well established. And so they sent down the two best able, these that had been instrumental - Peter on the Day of Pentecost, Peter and John as in Acts 4 in the Temple, and these are the two who have been sent by the Apostles in Jerusalem to share, to commune, to communicate, to participate.

Do you not see then that the matter that is to engage us in these next few verses is a matter of importance to the entire church. I say something that was brought to your attention last Sunday night. I think that in the New Testament, the idea of one seeing that there was a life called the Spirit-filled life, and then alone in anguish seeking, and praying as though he were having to blaze a trail all his own, is not the pattern of the New Testament, that on the contrary it was the concern of the eldership, it was the concern of the church for every least member, to enter into this normal relationship with Christ. And I would say then that when the apostles gathered, considered the reports that came from Samaria and felt it was of such tremendous importance that these people be well established at the outset of their Christian life, they sent Peter and John, this I say once and for all fixes the matter of the Spirit-filled life as of great importance to the whole church, and one that the eldership must always carry as its particular province of responsibility. Here it is. It is set forth so clearly, so unmistakably, that it ought to be accepted by us even without criticism that it is a church matter. Not just an individual's matter. It is not something that we should say, "Well let's hope, let's just trust, let's pray." It ought to become the concern of the entire church. It ought to be not restricted to the elders, for we discover that when Appolos came Priscilla and Aquilla were vitally concerned that he know the way more perfectly, and took time to share that way with him, in order that his life might be all that God intended it to be.

This is two things. First, it means that the Apostles had to recognize their responsibility. And we would extend it to the present and say that the elders in the local church must accept this as a responsibility from God. It is the responsibility of the elders to see to it that the members of the fellowship are conducted, and guided, and directed, and led. It is group responsibility that individuals must exercise. All twelve did not come, and it is not necessary for all twelve to be involved in any single individual's life, but it is beyond just one person alone with God. It is that, but it is not just that. There was a sense in which all must share. For if they were baptized and part of the church, and were in a state less than normal, less than God's desire, then they would weaken and impoverish the church in some sense. And so it was one of great concern. But there was a second thing here. The people recognized the ministry and the place of leadership, of the elders, and they accepted it, they accepted the ministry, they recognized their need of it. And this is equally important. It is one that we must not let slip in passing.

Now notice, when Peter and John were come down, they prayed for them. But I am confident, knowing human nature, in some little bit, and knowing the ministry in some little bit, this is a condensation. I cannot imagine Peter, and John, coming into the room and starting to pray before they said, Hello. The Jewish people have long salutations, you know. Shalom, Alechem, and so on. Just to say hello is a ten minute experience. And I am confident they did not say, Hello, and then start to pray. I think that this is a condensation of something that may have taken several days. I rather feel that Peter and John came down, and they first said, Now, Philip, tell us about it. And Philip related from the very beginning what happened. And then they said, "Well we would like to meet some of these people, bring them in, and let them talk to us." And so they brought them in. And then they said, "Well, we would like to have a public gathering, and we will explain to them why we have come." And so I think there was a public preaching, when Peter and John explained about the Day of Pentecost, and they explained about meeting in the Temple when 5 thousand were converted and baptized, and then they explained about what happened in Cornelius' house. And I am confident there was a sharing, bringing these people up to date, and filling in where they saw Philip had failed to

communicate, or had not had time to. And when this had been done, explaining exactly what they were going to do, and why they were going to do it, and what it was that was in their mind and upon their heart, then the people were prepared to be prayed for. I do not think you can just rush into a person's home or life and say, "We are going to do this, one, two, three." It does not work that way. And I am confident that Peter and John were wise in the extreme. They told first, they explained it, and then they took them one by one. Obviously it was one by one. You say, "Well how do you know?" Because they laid their hands on them, and they were just individuals. They only had two hands. The most they might have prayed for at one time were two. But very probably it was one. And very probably it was one for whom both of them prayed. And so it was a very personal matter.

You say, "Well what about the Day of Pentecost?" Yes, but you see this was the initiation. This was God's beginning. And so there was not any precedent, and there had to be something established. Well what happened to those three thousand on the Day of Pentecost. Well I do not know. It does not say. So you can prove anything from it, if you wanted to use silence as your argument. But what happened when the 5,000 were baptized? Well I do not know. It does not say. But I do know what happened here. I do know that Peter and John laid their hands on them and prayed for them. I do know what happened when Ananias went into the home where Saul was and laid his hands on him and said, Brother Saul. I do know what happened in Ephesus when Paul came there and found these believers and found they had been baptized with John's baptism, that is unto repentance and faith in Christ, and that they had never been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And so he baptized them in water, and then he laid his hands on them and prayed for them.

The point I am trying to make is this, that it was an exceedingly personal matter. It was not something done just quickly in a light way at all. I believe there was instruction. I believe there was encouragement. I believe hindrances and blocks were removed. I believe then when they prayed there was reason for the people to expect something would happen. They joined their faith to the faith of Peter and John, and there was such a result that it became absolutely apparent to mercenary Simon that when Peter and John prayed for people laid their hands on them and prayed for them, the Holy Ghost was given, and this he saw had commercial value. And so he asked that he might buy this. Perhaps we have this event with Simon inserted into the text as proof for the fact that when the church, represented by Peter and John, became concerned about the spiritual life of the people, and identified themselves with those people, that something wonderful happened. This is what I want to hold before you. That when the church becomes concerned about the spiritual wellbeing of the people, and will identify with the people in their need, and in their desire, something wonderful happens. It does, and we must understand this. We must recognize this.

Now there is a word here that has caused no end of difficulty. You know, translations have been the means of some confusion as well as great blessing. This word receive in verse 15, "Who, when they were come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost." And you would gather from this that it is a passive verb. They do something, and when they are doing it, they receive the Spirit of God, in the same sense in which you have your payroll deduction to buy war bonds, if you do. Or they take out your income tax from your payroll. You have unreceived something without any action, just that you got your check, and they have deducted from it. That is all. But the point is that you can lose without knowing it, as you can receive without knowing it. I could go to your bank account, and deposit in your account \$100 for example. You would have received it, but you would not have taken it. And if you are not informed about it, it would lay there to increase your balance, and you would charge it to an error in calculations and would be afraid to draw on it, because you did not know how it got there, figured that the next month the bank would correct the error and you would be without it. And so my putting the hundred dollars in would make no difference to you, because though you had received it you had not taken it. I am trying to point out the difference between receiving as a passive idea, and taking as an active idea, because I have a specific purpose.

This word is in the active voice. This word ought to be translated that Peter and John, when they came to them, prayed for them that they might take the Holy Ghost, that they might take Him. Do you see? Do you see the difference between taking in the sense of an act of the will, and an act of the intelligence, and receiving as some passive thing. Now when they were born of God, the Spirit of God came in because this is what happens when you are born again, but they did not need to know that. Now they are instructed and they are told, and they are encouraged in the faith of their hearts joined to the faith of Peter and John that they might take Him. They might take Him. Do you see the difference now between receive as a passive idea, and as

something that is the result of an act of faith, an act of understanding, an act of commitment, an act of appropriation. And this is what Peter and John are praying for, that they might realize that the Spirit of God is to fill them, and possess them, and control them, and that they might take Him who is offered to them by the Lord Jesus Christ. As the Spirit of God offered Christ to them, they received Christ. Now as the Lord Jesus, through Peter and John, offers the Holy Spirit to fill them and possess them, and control them, to come upon them, to be their wisdom, their grace, their strength, their love, their power, they are to reach out the hands of their heart and take Him who is offered by the Lord Jesus. Geographically no distance is involved. For even before they were converted in God they lived and moved and had their being. It was not that the Spirit of God had to come from some distant place to where He was not to meet them. It was that they had to understand who He was, and what He wanted to do, and they had to take Him. And the word, because after all we have to in some verbal idea, was The Spirit of God came upon them, covering, clothing. But what a lovely preposition it is to express their conscious awareness of God, relating Himself to them. And we will understand this.

Just today one bore testimony to me. We have been seeking to teach by one way and another something of this life that is ours in Christ. And last year you recall Dr. Robert Roger Brown from Omaha came with us for a retreat at Hudson House and then for ministry here on the Lord's Day. And he gave an invitation, not related particularly, but he said, "If you are here and there is hunger, and desire," — and the one who brought the testimony said they went into Wilson Chapel, as others did on that occasion, and they were praying. Dr. Brown would go from one to the other and say, "Don't pray that way. Pray this way." But you know, something happen, wonderfully, wonderfully happens, when a heart is released in obedient and expectant faith, and the testimony that was given was this, Why it was just as though I knew Him for the first time, He became so wonderfully, wonderfully real. Now when Peter and John came down, they prayed for them that they might take, that they might enter into a relationship that would make the Lord wonderfully, wonderfully real. This was a matter of concern. It was a matter of our concern, of course, in bringing Dr. Brown to minister. And it was a matter of his concern. But our concern ought not to stop then. Put it this way, there is a fellowship in which you have been called. Now if you understand that there is a life in the Spirit of God that is not yours, do not stop talking about it and about Him just because you have not. You can say, "You know this is where I am going, join me." But if you have come to that light, and life, and understanding, then you ought to be willing to share with others. And of course, then you will pray for the eldership of this church, and any church where God may lead you that they may understand that knowing Christ in this normal, mature, Biblical way, is the concern of the church, not just the individual. But then you will understand also that it ought to be be the concern of the individual to recognize leadership.

I believe that our Heavenly Father said to the Lord Jesus that He could heal anybody that asked Him, but I do not see that He healed those who did not ask Him. And I believe that there are many people that are deferred from some meeting with the Lord because they have not made known their need. They have not admitted it, or they have not asked. And so it seems to me that, as it is the responsibility of the eldership to be greatly concerned and available, it is also the concern of all to enter in as rapidly and as fully as possible into what is the normal Christian life. And this we see. Philip did all that he could. Word went to Jerusalem, Peter and John were sent. They instructed them, they taught them, they helped them, they talked to them, and they drew them on. And this I believe is what the Holy Ghost is wanting in your life, a recognition that what you have you can share, what is before you that you do not have, you can also seek to have the church share with you for there are those who are concerned, vitally concerned in your becoming all that the Word holds for you as God's will. There is a fellowship, beloved, in the fullness of the Spirit, just as there is a fellowship in every other area of our Christian life.

Shall we bow together in prayer. Our Father, we thank and praise Thee that Thou hast given to us this privilege of being sharers together of our Lord and all that He provided. We know so little, and we want to know so much. We want everything that Thou didst intend to be ours through Christ, everything that He purchased so lovingly with His poured out life, to become ours. Father, we do not want to ignore Thy provisions or squander Thy grace. We want to be eager. We want to be led in reality, in wholesome fullness and balance into all that is ours in Him. We believe it is a concern of the Church. We ask Thee to move upon the eldership of this church, every single one that has received the responsibility from this congregation, both to know the fullness of the Spirit, to walk in the fullness of the Spirit, and to have great concern for our people, everyone entering into this relationship with Thee. By the same token, Father, we ask that Thou wilt stir the hearts of men and women, and

young people, as well, to long for Thy best and to seek help and go to those whom they feel may help them, share their concern and their burden, and enter into a fellowship in their desire for the fullness of Thyself. Now bind this word to our hearts, bless the College and Career group that meets, make the memory of this night precious, because it has resulted in exalting the Lord Jesus before our eyes. We ask it in His name and for His sake. Amen. (Invitation)

Let us stand for the Benediction. Now unto Him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before His presence with exceeding joy, to the only wise God, our Savior, be glory and honor, dominion and majesty, now and forever. Amen.

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Evening, November 18, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

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