

The King's Highway

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Sanctification

Acts 8 contains a precious paragraph of Scripture. Verses 14 to 24 tell of the Samaritans receiving the Holy Ghost, and of Simon the sorcerer's wrong idea of this experience.

Immediately after the great revival in Samaria, the elders at Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria. They prayed for the group of new converts, and they received the Holy Ghost. Simon, seeing the great power given by the laying on of the apostles' hands, asked to buy this power. Peter told him his heart must be right before he could receive sanctification.

These Samaritans whom Peter and John prayed for were filled with the Holy Spirit—sanctified. Notice that they did not speak in unknown tongues. We may be sure the Bible would have mentioned the fact if they had, for this was the first movement of evangelism beyond the city of Jerusalem. Also, such a great number received the Holy Spirit that, had they spoken in unknown tongues, it would have been a greater phenomenon than what happened on the Day of Pentecost, and certainly the writer of Acts would have recorded the fact.

All of us are greatly concerned about this matter of sanctification. It is the thing that turns life from a decline to an incline, both for the church and the individual. It is the spiritual substance that fills up our souls and causes us to sell out for God. It makes us zealous workers. It is the cure for lethargy. It is the perfecter of God's holiness that is within us, and it makes us to be the best worker we can be in the present moment.

First, let's eliminate some minor items from this Bible story of how the Samaritans were sanctified. Then we can see more clearly the significant factors in sanctification.

The going of Peter and John to Samaria is a minor item. Some Bible teachers say that because Peter and John were apostles and Philip was not, they had to go to Samaria, because only the apostles could give the new converts the Holy Spirit.

The next chapter (Acts 9) disproves such an idea, for in it we read that a humble layman named Ananias laid his hands upon the great Paul, and Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter and John were only incidents to this incident recorded in Acts 8. Likely the church chose them to go to Samaria to see if this revival was genuine, because they would be qualified to tell. It may be, too, that the Lord was here preparing Peter's mind for his trip to the Gentiles in Cornelius' house.

Another minor item in this great mass experience of receiving the Holy Spirit was the laying on of hands. It was not the laying on of hands that brought the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given direct from God into the human heart. This account merely mentions the form used in asking for and receiving sanctification—this second work of grace. This form goes back to the Old Testament.

From early times a dedicated object had the dedicated

hands of a man of God laid upon it. Jesus laid His hands on people in healing the sick, in raising the dead, in blessing children. This form has symbolic value; it suggests God's acceptance. When God's man lays his hands upon a dedicated object, it means God accepts it.

But the laying on of hands is only form. Dear and precious though the form is, it is only form. Others mentioned in the New Testament, and people since then, received the Holy Spirit with no laying on of hands. This is a minor item in the story of the Samaritans' sanctification.

One more minor item in this matter of sanctification in Samaria is the fact that the experience was subjected to abuse. The worst enemies of sanctification are sometimes its loudest advocates. They make unrealistic claims for it while living shabby lives.

Simon wanted to buy the experience so he could resell it and be a miracle-worker. Notice where the abuse of the experience came in—in its form, the laying on of hands. Simon looked at the form and thought, "That's where the power is; I must have that power." It is always the form of religion that is corrupted first. Too often we have let the ceremony of a second trip to the altar or a flash dedication take the place of a real experience of sanctification. The reality of the experience is missed and the truth abused because just making a second trip to the altar may not give one the second blessing.

But shall we drop the glorious truth of sanctification because some abuse it? Do we dispense with goodness, generosity, and motherhood just because they are abused? Certainly not, and we will not neglect the great experience of sanctification just because some misrepresent it.

Now let us examine the great, plain facts about sanctification in this Scripture portion—the things that are significant.

This glorious infilling came as a second work of grace. It came after the Samaritans were pardoned. They first "received the word". They believed. They decided for Christ. They were saved. But they still needed something more; they needed the empowering from on high.

Simon the sorcerer proves the point in a negative sense. He wanted to buy sanctification, and Peter told him he could not be sanctified because his life was in the grips of iniquity. His heart was wrong, and it would have to be changed before he could receive the Holy Spirit. Always, the heart must be right. Repentance comes first. Simon had to have a change of heart in order to receive sanctification—and so will you.

Another plain fact about sanctification is that it comes as a gift. It is a grant from God. That is why it is called grace. It is God's gracious energy. It is not something worked up or worked down or worked out, but given by God and received from Him.

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