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Doesn't Acts Argue That Not All Believers Receive the Holy Spirit?

July 8, 2024



#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about why we should think the new believers in Acts 5:14 received the Holy Spirit when Acts seems to argue that not all believers necessarily receive the Spirit and whether "Holy Ghost" is a degrading term for the Holy Spirit.

* Why should we think the new believers in Acts 5:14 received the Holy Spirit when it doesn't say so? Doesn't Acts argue that not all believers necessarily receive the Holy Spirit, especially given 8:9-17?

* Is "Holy Ghost" a degrading term for the Holy Spirit?

Transcript

This is Amy Hall and Greg Cochle, and you are listening to Stand to Reason's hashtag, STR Ask Podcast. Good morning, Amy. Good morning, Greg.

You ready for the first question? Let's do it. This one comes from Joshua. Why should we think the new believers in Acts 5-14, for example, received the Spirit when it doesn't say so? Acts seems to argue not all believers in Acts 5-14.

all believers get the spirit necessarily, especially given 8, 9, 3, 17. Okay, we're going to go over these passages here and there is a sense in which I'm going to agree with him. Acts doesn't argue that.

What acts and also, especially in the book of John, not so much acts, but John makes it clear that not all believers are believers in a salvific sense. It says there in the beginning of the gospel chapter 2 or somewhere, you know, it says, and many were believing in him, but Jesus wasn't entrusting himself to any of them because he knew what was in the heart of man. Okay, and there are occasions, I think John 8, I just read this recently where he's talking about being for the truth shall set you free.

Well, it identifies his conversations there with believers. And then there's a big argument

that ensues because those people, to whom he's speaking, quote unquote, believers say, we are children of Abraham, we have never been enslaved to anyone. There's an argument that Jesus has with them.

And now they're opposing him, but these are the ones that the text identified as believers. And there's a number of occasions where you see that. And what this demonstrates is that there is two, I think, two different kinds of belief.

A belief that and a belief in is the way I distinguish it. Now, that's not the language that the text uses, but the distinction is in the text. And I'm using this kind of language to make this distinction.

We can believe that something is true, but we don't believe in it unless we are putting our trust in it. I can believe that the airplane could take me to Wisconsin, for example. And, but I don't express trust in it until I get on the airplane.

And so that's the simplest way that I can think of explaining the difference that I'm talking about. And you see this distinction many times in Scripture. There are people who believe that is they make some kind of affirmation regarding the claims that Jesus is making.

But as you read further, you realize that this person's belief is not the kind of belief that results in regeneration. So there's a certain sense in which the concern that was raised is accurate. We just have to read carefully.

We also have to look at theological verities. And that is, in Ephesians chapter 1, Paul says clearly that when we believe we receive the Holy Spirit of promise. And later in the book, he says we are sealed in that spirit until the day of redemption.

And so I actually think he says in chapter 1, we believe unsealed, and then until the day of redemption in later chapters. But the point is, is that as a theological standard, those who exercise a genuine trust in Jesus get the Holy Spirit as a permanent thing. That's the regeneration.

If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things have passed away new things have come. This is standard pneumatology, doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

All right. Now, you do have an odd circumstance in the book of Acts where you're transitioning from an Old Testament economy to a New Testament economy, which means an Old Covenant economy to a New Covenant economy. And by the way, the New Covenant economy was the economy that includes the giving of the Spirit as a permanent possession.

Okay, we read about this in Ezekiel. And as in anticipating of this coming, and then Joel, I will pour out my spirit on all mankind. And this is a passage that is quoted in Acts

chapter 2 by Peter as evidencing the fulfillment of the, I should say as pointing to the, what is the occasion there in Acts chapter 2 as a fulfillment of that prophecy.

But there are people who are, who believed John the Baptist about Jesus, but they went in a New Testament economy. And so there is a, there is a transition where believers in the Old Testament sense transition into the New Testament at some time they get the Holy Spirit. And we see this, we see it there in Acts chapter 2 in Jerusalem.

Then we see Judea, that's Acts chapter 4. We see a similar inauguration of receiving the Spirit. Now, this is to Samaritan's, this is half-breed. And then it's to the uttermost parts of, then it's to Gentiles.

And we see that in Acts chapter 10 with Cornelius. Okay, so there seems to be an obvious transitioning. The question here isn't about when you receive the Spirit though.

I think it's principally about people who are believers that don't have the Spirit. And sometimes these quote unquote believers don't have the Spirit because they're not believers. And this brings us to the Acts 8 passage.

And this is an important passage because following our rule never read a Bible verse, when you read the entire incident about Philip and Samaria, you learn some things. For example, in verse 6 it talks about Philip attracting crowds because he was doing signs and wonders to validate and verify the gospel message. And then many were responding in belief.

Now, there's another guy that's part of the mob who had been someone kind of liked that. It's Simon. He's the magician.

And it said, with regards to Simon, there was a man, verse 9, who formerly was practicing magic of the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great until, and they all from smallest to greatest were giving attention to him saying, this man is what is called a great power of God. So that's his past. And now here's Philip coming in with a power doing signs.

He had been practicing Simon, the magical arts, verse 11. But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized men and women alike. Even Simon, even Simon himself believed.

Now, I'm going to explain why I did this in a moment. But in my own Bible, I put the word believe in scare quotes. Well, there was a belief.

Okay. And we're going to see why in a minute, even Simon believed and was baptized. And then he continued on with Philip.

And as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

Now, remember, he's the magician. He used to do things like this.

And Philip doing that. And then he asks, oh, then it says, I'll just keep reading. So we maintain the context.

Now, when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that those in Samaria had received the word of God, they said Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Now, this is very important because remember, Americans were half breeds. They were half Gentile, half, half Jewish, and they had a different place to worship.

We see this in some of the conversation with the woman at the well in John chapter four, they had different theology. There was competition here. Okay.

Now, Jesus made it clear that the Jews got it right, and the Samaritans didn't. But this, because there was this difference that Samaritans, of Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world, we see that progression. And here it's now going to Samaria.

The problem is, though, if the Samaritans just kind of get the Holy Spirit in isolation from the rest of the Jewish community, that rift between them is going to continue. Now, this is speculative, okay, but it's a good explanation for why these things happen, because Philip preaching, and then people are responding to the gospel and believing, but they don't have a Holy Spirit. All right.

And then who comes down? The pillars of the Jewish Church, James and John. And back to my text now. Now, when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they said Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

So, because it says it had not fallen upon them, they had just simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. This is part of the transition, okay? It's later when Paul writes, having believed, received, that becomes the standard. But right now, you can see the difficulty with these disparate groups of people with their hostilities, all right? And this is why in Acts chapter 10, Peter says, hey, look at, he's telling us Jewish friends, they received the Holy Spirit just as we did.

There was a supernatural manifestation there. They began speaking in tongues. And they said, even the Gentiles have received the Spirit, okay? What's interesting there is there you have kind of, you know, this amalgam of the old and the new, because now you have a Gentile, when they believe they immediately received the Spirit and give manifestations for the apostle, Peter, to see so he can verify that Gentiles are now in.

So, it's neither June or Greek nor Samaritan anymore in the body of Christ. It's all one in Christ. We all have the same spirit, okay? Now, what's interesting about this, and this goes more to the point is what happens with Simon, okay? There he says he had

believed they laid hands on the Samaritans there and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

Now, when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles hands, he offered them money saying, give this authority to me as well so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit. Now, what does this sound like? This sounds like his old way of life. He wants to do magic too.

He used to be called the great power of God. Now you got these other guys that are the power of God giving the Holy Spirit. Oh, I'll pay you if you teach me or help me to learn how to do this.

What's Peter's response? I'll listen to the words. May your silver perish with you because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money. You have no part or portion in this manner for your heart is not right before God.

Doesn't sound like a believer to me. Therefore, repent of the wickedness of yours and pray the Lord if possible the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.

That doesn't sound like a believer either. Not a regenerated believer. Someone who had a belief, that's why he's hanging around, but not the kind of belief that saves.

This is the distinction that I'm making here. One more verse in that section. After Peter tells him to turn and repent and seek forgiveness, here's what he says.

But Simon answered and said, pray to the Lord for me yourself so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me. How is he treating Peter? He's treating Peter like a magician. You got the magic.

You do this to me. Notice even at this point, this severe chastisement, he's not genuinely repenting to receive the forgiveness that Peter promises or refers to. But rather he says, you do it.

You work the magic. So I wrote in my Bible. To him, Simon, it's still magic.

And Peter is the magician. I think what this shows really clearly as Simon is not regenerate, even though at some level he believed. And you see that in different parts of Acts and also in the Gospels, notably in the Gospel of John, I'm familiar with those occasions now, just because I've been reading through the Gospel of John in the last week or two.

So that's something to keep in mind. There are a lot of people who make professions of faith about Jesus. They have no staying power and they have no staying power because I don't think they're regenerate.

They don't have the Holy Spirit because whatever it is they believed, it wasn't what was necessary to result in regeneration. So whether you're talking about Simon or the Gentiles who are believing, those are answers for both of those things. So the transition, I think, is key where God was very explicitly showing them that he was extending this covenant to the other groups of people.

Under the leadership of the Jewish church, the apostles were party to all of these points of transition. That's key. And one thing you touched on, Greg, that I think bears repeating is the idea that the receiving of the Spirit is definitional to the new covenant.

This is how the new covenant is described. And you mentioned Ezekiel with the valley of dry bones. Well, that's 38.

37 has more information. Go ahead. So you also mentioned Ephesians.

So I just wanted to read this quickly and then I have one more passage that addresses this. But Paul says that you also, after listening to the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed you were sealed in him with the Holy Spirit of promise who is given as a pledge of our inheritance with the view to the redemption of God's own possession. So this is not the Holy Spirit is not some sort of add on to the gospel.

The whole point is God choosing a people for himself, redeeming a people for himself, changing who they are, making them new creations, giving them a new heart, making them his people. Like this is all, this is the nature of the gospel without the Holy Spirit. This isn't this isn't the new covenant.

So just look at Romans eight, Romans eight, the whole point of that is talking about how the difference between the new covenant and the covenant under the law, where you did not have the power to kill your sin, you didn't have the power to do what God wants us to do. Whereas now we have the Holy Spirit. And this is what he said.

But if anyone does not have the spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him. I don't know how you get any clearer than that. His whole point is the spirit is the sign of the new covenant.

If you have the spirit, you have Christ. If you don't have the spirit, then you don't belong to Christ. And that's really the bottom line here.

Yeah, keep in mind that is post transition, because this transition we're talking about of necessity, something like that had to happen, because you have believers, even the apostles. They were believers. Jesus said in John, he's threaded today.

He's a coach on 17 when he's washing their feet. He says, you're clean. You are, you are clean.

Not all of you referring to Judas, but the rest of you are already clean, but they didn't have the Holy Spirit in the new covenant sense. Wait until the Holy Spirit is given. And that, of course, happened on Pentecost.

We read about it in Acts chapter two. So there is that transition from the old to new, and it happened in three different groups, actually, for if you count the disciples of John the Baptist, who had not learned anything about the Holy Spirit. Okay.

And we see that later in the book of Acts. But after that, you have the transition complete. And then, and then all of these things that you just described become the standard, for lack of a better word, experience of the Christian.

In other words, it happens to them. It doesn't necessarily mean it's accompanied by some euphoria. Sometimes it is, sometimes it isn't.

But the, but there is a palpable, significant transformation, that's the new birth that happens with genuine faith in Christ. And notice there's a difference in genre of what we're reading. So there's the historical book of Acts where it's describing what happened.

But then you have the epistle that's giving a theological explanation of how things are. So we have to look at the situation that's happening when it's talking about the Holy Spirit being given specially to different groups of people as they're transitioning. Yes, in light of the theological statement.

Right, right. But when we're looking for theology, the place to look for that is where it's explicitly being explained, not where we're trying to determine certain things from exactly what happens. If we, if all we had was Acts, well, I can see how people would be confused and come up with some different ideas.

But we have more than Acts, we have, as you cited Paul and Romans 8, anyone who's not have the spirit of Christ is none of his. You're either in the flesh or in the spirit. That's the contrast he's making and being in the spirit means to be regenerate.

It doesn't mean being holy at the moment. It means to be regenerate is to have, you are not in the flesh if indeed the spirit dwells in you. And if he does it, you're not his as you read.

So that's very explicit and clear. So we have time for one more quick one, Greg. This one comes from Benjamin.

A lot of people seem to refer to the Holy Spirit as the Holy Ghost. This has always seemed to me to be a degrading term. Well, I, I think it's just a matter of culture.

I was raised Roman Catholic and they always said the Holy Ghost. Now, in, in the Greek,

it's Numa, right? So Numa can be applied in different ways. It can be characterized in different ways.

I think that's the word. And it's referring to the invisible spiritual substance. It's the way some people maybe refer to ghosts.

I mean, the English word ghost. But because when you think about what a ghost is, a ghost is the immaterial self returning, okay, and haunting people, presumably. And so I can see the majority of sense that somebody might have, might attribute to the word ghost, but it doesn't have that sense to a whole lot of people who have grown up calling the spirit the Holy Ghost.

And it's, I mean, it's a non-issue for Roman Catholics. So I think it's just a matter of culture. And if that's troublesome, don't say Holy Ghost, say Holy Spirit, it is the way it's translated in the scriptures.

I wonder if the King James is a ghost or not. Well, that's why I think this is just a leftover term from hundreds of years ago, when it was used a different way, just to mean spirit. Yeah.

And I'll see if I can figure out, I hadn't even thought to look it up. But it's, does the King James do a great deal? I don't know. I was wondering myself that, but it is a personal, go ahead.

Yes, it's in the King James. So that's probably how, and some people then, they think of, oh, wait, that Shakespeare and Hamlet's, the Ghost and Hamlet or whatever, and they go, oh, wait, we don't want to have that. So we'll just call it the Holy Spirit, which is a legitimate way of understanding or translating that word.

And it's stuck with some groups, but not with others. So it's just a difference. Yeah.

So I think, again, this word is just, it used to mean spirit. People used to just think of spirit, and that's why it was used. But it is something to keep in mind, because it didn't even occur to me to think when, if I ever say the Holy Ghost, that someone's going to hear something, you know, they're not, they didn't grow up with using Holy Ghost.

And they might think of it differently. I mean, I guess that's just something for us to keep in mind as we're talking to others. But I don't think anyone means anything degrading.

All right, we're at a time. Thank you, Benjamin. And thank you, Joshua.

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We look forward to hearing from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for a stand to

reason.