

Expectations Series – Part 1  
**The Holy Spirit – What Do you Expect?**  
*Acts 8:4-24 Simon the Magician*

**PRAYER**

Today we're going to examine one of the more difficult passages in the NT. It is the story of Simon the Magician, a believer in Samaria. We are going to look at how he perceived the Holy Spirit's work, and what he expected for himself in the kingdom. Our title is "The Holy Spirit – What Do You Expect?" As believers, we sometimes expect God to use us in a particular way, or to bestow a particular gift on us, or to reward us with a particular blessing, or to free us from a situation – or from our own sin, *without any effort*. We know we shouldn't expect any of this yet, there it is: we want something from God, for ourselves. We expect something from God, for ourselves. Like Paul, we want to personally know and experience the same power that raised Christ from the dead.<sup>1</sup> We'll look at the power that a man named Simon the Magician wanted from God – it was something he was willing to pay for, but only with money. To this day, we call buying and selling spiritual things "simony," named after him. He thought the Church was for sale.

Before we read it, I want to give you a brief background. In 30 AD Christ was crucified; he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. Forty days later, at the festival of weeks which we call Pentecost, the Spirit rushed in with a mighty wind and took possession of the disciples, gifting them, and filling them with power. Peter and John heal a cripple at the temple gate. They give their testimony to the Sanhedrin. Ananias and Sapphira lie to the Holy Spirit, and they die. The Church is growing. And all of this is under that same power. A Hellenist named Stephen is chosen as a leader in the Church at Jerusalem. He exercises that power with extraordinary effect (Ac 6:5). But in AD 33, just 3 years after Christ's crucifixion, Stephen is unexpectedly stoned to death. Saul, later to be known as Paul, held the coats of those who killed Stephen, approving of what was done (Ac 22:20).

This began a great persecution by Saul of the church at Jerusalem. As a result, many believers who expected to continue their lives unaffected by their faith, were forced to flee Jerusalem. The Shepherd was struck, and the sheep were scattered. But they carried the Gospel with them to every city they fled to. They never expected to be evangelists; yet each one of these men and women proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ to neighbors and acquaintances, to Jews and to gentiles.

They also proclaimed it to the Samaritans – those with whom no decent Jew would associate. Now Peter has not yet had his vision of the sheet coming down with unclean foods, nor has he visited the gentile Centurion. And yet, even now, seeds are being planted in "foreign" soil; not gentile soil *yet*, but foreign soil. This is something no one expected. The Gospel is spreading by unexpected means, to unexpected people. This is where we encounter Philip the Evangelist, one of those who fled Jerusalem – this is NOT Philip the Apostle – this is Philip the *Evangelist*. He has come to Samaria to preach, watering the existing seed, explaining and affirming the message these people first received from Christ through the woman at the well, and then from these

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<sup>1</sup> Phil 3:10

Jerusalem refugees. The seed has taken root here, as it will throughout the known world. The Spirit is at work, building his Church on the foundation of Christ. Please stand with me as we read from Acts 8:4-24.

## READ ACTS 8:4-24

When we speak of the Holy Spirit and his work in the Church, there are three primary things that we need to address: gifts, fruits (Gal 5:22), and empowering. These are three *separate* things. When we confuse them, and we equate gifts with personal power, or we equate fruits with personal power, or when we confuse gifts and fruits, then we begin to go down the wrong path in both our understanding and our practice. Let me distinguish them so that we're clear about what we're talking about here. Gifts are variously listed in 1Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians, and 1Peter.<sup>2</sup> They are manifestations of the Spirit's presence, and they are intended to profit the Church.<sup>3</sup> They are ordained and distributed by the Spirit, in both scope and depth, according to the will of God. Some get one, some another. Some have it to an extraordinary extent; others to a limited extent. These gifts are bestowed on individual believers to build up or to edify the local church. No gift is intended for our own personal benefit.

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is *evidence* of God's grace at work in us, and among us. We can develop our gifts, but we *cannot* directly develop fruits or even exercise them. They are descriptions or byproducts of obedience and maturity. The milk of salvation will not produce fruit; but the meat of obedience will. So, while we cannot *induce* spiritual fruit, we can *produce* it. We can *grow* to full maturity in Christ, as we are commanded to do.<sup>4</sup>; and as we grow, we will produce spiritual fruit in increasing measure. Fruit, therefore, only comes with time and maturity. But it would seem that Simon doesn't want to wait, or to do the necessary work. He wants the signs, the fruit, and the power, without serving. He wants a shortcut to maturity. That sounds all too familiar, doesn't it? So many of us want to believe, and receive all the benefits of Christ's obedient work on the cross, but we don't want to have to prove our belief by our obedience. We want to wear the title of Christian, but we don't want to act like Christ. We want a fire insurance policy against the flames of hell, without paying premiums. We would rather be passively changed in an instant by God's Spirit, than to struggle and strive all our lives. That's Simon the Magician. That's us. He is the poster boy for easy-believism.

If we remain immature, if we fail to repent of our old ways, if we don't exercise our gifts by faithful, gracious, loving service, then we *cannot* show the fruit of the Spirit. Fruit is the sign of the Holy Spirit at work in us. If he's not at work, how can we possibly expect a sign? As you've heard before, this growth process, which we call *sanctification*, is a *cooperative* venture. First we act in faith, and *then* the Holy Spirit empowers us to do the will of God. By doing the will of God more and more, we grow more and more. We become stronger, and more powerful, but only as instruments of God. That takes us to the third aspect of the Spirit's work in us.

Power is ALWAYS supplied by the Spirit. We cannot call it up from within ourselves. Power (1) is always given for GOD's purposes, (2) employing OUR giftedness, (3) as the SITUATION

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<sup>2</sup> 1Cor 12:28-30; Rom 12:6-8; Eph 4:7,11-12; 1Pet 4:9-11

<sup>3</sup> 1Cor 12:8-10

<sup>4</sup> Eph 4:13

requires, (4) for GOD'S glory. Therefore, God's power comes and goes according to the situation. The power of the Holy Spirit waxes and wanes: it grows and diminishes, according to God's will. We are "over"-powered when the Holy Spirit comes upon us. He determines what is needed to further the kingdom, and who will be his instrument as He fulfills the Father's decrees, so that Christ is exalted by it.

However, in our flesh we want to be able to appropriate that power when WE want it, for OUR purposes, so that WE might be exalted, *in place of Christ*. That was the story of Mickey Mouse in *Fantasia*, making the broomsticks dance. He was trying to be the Master; he was not content to be the Master's apprentice; he would not wait until he was ready. He wanted the power right now, mistakenly thinking that power was in the wand, the instrument, and not in his Master's wisdom and control. That's what Simon the Magician thought as well. He watches and sees Peter and John identifying the gifts, at which point they laid on hands. He thought that by laying on hands, they were bestowing the gifts. He knew neither the Scriptures nor the power of God (Mat 22:29). That's why his "heart is not right before God." He wanted and expected to wield this power just as he formerly wielded his magic; more than that, I think he wanted to receive the same glory through the Gospel that he enjoyed through his magic: he wasn't ready to serve yet; he wasn't willing to take on the yoke of Christ first. Look again at verses 9-11:

**Acts 8:9-11** 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. <sup>10</sup> They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." <sup>11</sup> And they paid attention to him, because *for a long time* he had amazed them with his magic.

Have you ever been the big fish in the little pond, and then lost your status to someone else? That's what happened to Simon here. Do you see it? Not only has Simon, in his former life, *sought* the spotlight for himself, but the people have *given* it to him. Both things are at work. Both things HAVE to be at work for us to draw glory to ourselves. Do we give glory to men when it is due to God? Do we follow after men instead of Christ, as the Church at Corinth followed after Apollos, Paul, and Peter? And what has happened to Simon's fame and glory? Philip the Evangelist has come. He has brought the Gospel, with *power*, which is now amazing the people of Samaria, overshadowing the magic of Simon.

**Act 8:4-8** Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them; and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city.

I'm not sure that Simon was glad for those who were healed. I suspect he wanted that power to heal and cast out demons so that he could draw attention to himself and regain his reputation. What do his actions reveal?

**Act 8:12-13** 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. <sup>13</sup> *Even Simon himself*

*believed*, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

“He continued with Philip”; I think he followed him about trying to learn the secret to this power, gaining prestige by association. Maybe he listened to Philip’s words as if they were incantations, and memorized them. Maybe he tried to imitate laying on hands, and mimicked the prayers. He didn’t know that the Spirit works from the inside out. Unlike Philip, Simon didn’t receive these gifts of healing. Why not? Because the Spirit “*blows where he will*,” Jn 3:8. Peter and John come down to Samaria to see what has happened among the Samaritans.<sup>5</sup> They are performing even greater “magic” that amazes the people even more. As a result, Simon probably feels pushed aside, marginalized. And he’s bitter about it.

**Act 8:14-16** Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

These two Apostles are busy laying on hands to identify those who will become leaders in this new church in Samaria (I’ll explain that shortly). Simon is watching, again. These leaders are the ones the people will submit to. They have been gifted by the Spirit, and identified for leadership by the Apostles. They are speaking in various languages and prophesying the Word of God. The Church at Samaria is being assigned its overseers to guide and protect it; *and Simon, unexpectedly, is not one of them; so he’s hurt, and he’s jealous, like a poison festering inside him.*

Now, about laying on hands. Who did Peter and John pray for, and lay hands on? It’s not clear. Were any of these people saved before Peter and John came? It seems so. It says, “*Samaria had received the word of God.*” They did not refuse it. They believed it. Even Simon the Magician believed it. They were all baptized, including Simon the Magician. Christians are baptized only upon a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ. So whoever is spoken of here credibly professed their faith in Jesus Christ. And yet the Holy Spirit has “*not yet fallen on any of them.*” How is that possible? We receive the promise of the Spirit upon our profession of faith in Christ, upon hearing with faith.<sup>6</sup> So what is going on here? What condition are they in? What does “*not yet fallen on*” mean?

The Greek word means to be seized or gripped with power. If you’ll recall, the Apostles believed in Christ at his resurrection, and yet they had to wait 40 days after his Ascension before they were empowered by the Spirit, for he had not yet come. But here, at this point in time in Samaria, the event of Pentecost was long over. The Spirit has been at work through his people for over three years. Is there some second event, some second blessing, some second baptism that we must receive in order to be saved? Hardly. But there is an empowerment, as I said, which comes and goes. Let’s look at a similar passage in Acts. Turn to Acts 19. Let’s see if we can get a handle on this.

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<sup>5</sup> We don’t know the time frame here, whether it was weeks, months, or years. But some time has elapsed.

<sup>6</sup> Gal 3:2, 5, 14; Jn 7:39; Act 2:38;

**Acts 19:1-7** <sup>ESV</sup> And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. <sup>2</sup>And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” <sup>3</sup> And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” <sup>4</sup> And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” <sup>5</sup> On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. <sup>7</sup> There were about twelve men in all.

So, upon hearing with faith, they were baptized; but notice that the Spirit did not “come upon” them until Paul laid hands on them. Like “fallen on”, “come upon” has a specific meaning. Literally it reads, “overcame” them. Mary wanted to know how it would be possible to have a child without having been with a man, and she was told, “**The Holy Spirit will come upon you...**” It’s the same word, “overcome” (Lk 1:35). It is used throughout the OT to indicate God’s Spirit overcoming someone, empowering them for his purposes, usually a prophet or leader. Did Peter and John lay hands on every believer in Samaria? Not likely. Does regeneration require laying on hands? Does receiving the Spirit require it? *Of course not.*

What about speaking in tongues? Is this the sign of receiving the Spirit, and of our salvation? NO. If it were, why would Paul ask the Corinthians, “**Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?**” 1Cor 12:30 It’s a rhetorical question. *He means we don’t.* Tongues is not the sign of salvation.

Let’s go back to **Act 8:17** “**THEN they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.**” Who does “they” refer to? If it is every Samaritan, then *none* of us can receive the Holy Spirit unless somebody who already has the Spirit is willing to lay hands on us to impart the Spirit to us. Was Philip not willing to do that? Did he forget? Does anyone have the discretion to impart or withhold the Spirit as he chooses? **John 1:12-13** “**But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,** <sup>13</sup> **who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of GOD.**” Does our salvation ever depend on the salvation of the person who evangelizes us? *Never!*

**Matthew 7:22-23** ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ <sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

So the answer is NO! Our regeneration, baptism, gifting, and empowerment are not dependent on the hands, knowledge, or status of anyone but *Christ*. These things are dependent upon the power and the will of God alone. And yet Simon thinks he can get this power to use as his own – he wants that power and the discretion to use it. Why? I think it’s to regain his lost status. Notice in verse 18 that he doesn’t ask to receive the power of the Spirit for himself, to use it for *God’s* purposes. Instead, he wants to *dispense* the power for *his own* purposes, to serve his own fleshly desires, to exercise control.

Act 8:18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,<sup>19</sup> saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Simon expects this particular gift to be his, even though it was given only to the Apostles but not to others – obviously Philip the Evangelist didn't have it. He wants it to be his, under his dominion, to dispense it as he sees fit. He wants the control it will afford him. He wants to usurp the role of elder without being gifted for it, and without being qualified for it. That discretion is God's and not ours, as I indicated earlier. So what happened when the Apostles laid their hands on these men? Did they cause them to speak in tongues and prophesy? Or did they identify these men as qualified for eldership, and then the Spirit gifted them for it?

Laying on hands, whether in the OT or NT, conveys something from one being to another. In the OT, hands were laid on animals to convey the sins of the Israelites to them as atoning sacrifices<sup>7</sup>; it placed blame on an offender<sup>8</sup>; it consecrated priests for God's service<sup>9</sup>; and it was used to bless.<sup>10</sup> In the NT, hands were also laid on to bless<sup>11</sup>; and to heal<sup>12</sup> – although healing always comes by faith and never by the act of laying on hands; and it's also used to consecrate someone.<sup>13</sup> In Hebrews we read:

**Hebrews 6:1-2** Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,<sup>2</sup> and of instruction about washings (baptisms), *the laying on of hands*, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

It's funny that the writer of Hebrews thinks that the purpose of laying on hands is so obvious that he lists it with elementary doctrines. *Everybody* knew what it was for. Why then is there so much confusion in the Church today? In 1Tim 5:22, Timothy is cautioned, "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure." If laying on hands is to convey the Holy Spirit, why in the world should Timothy hesitate? Was Paul implying that Timothy might convey the Spirit to someone who is not saved? That makes no sense!

This verse in Acts 8 must be understood within the context of the Book of Acts and then within the context of the whole of Scripture. Is the Holy Spirit conveyed by the hands of men or by the Hand of God? Some will say He is conveyed by the Hand of God through the hands of men. What's the answer? Turn with me to John 20:21-24. After Christ's resurrection, he appears to the disciples and says to them,

"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."<sup>22</sup> And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."<sup>23</sup> If you forgive the

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<sup>7</sup> Ex 29:10,15,19; Lev 1:4; Lev 3, 4; Lev 16:21 (goat at Yom Kippur);

<sup>8</sup> Lev 24:14

<sup>9</sup> Num 8:5-14

<sup>10</sup> Gen 48:17

<sup>11</sup> Mt 19:13,15; Mk 10:16

<sup>12</sup> Mt 9:18; Mk 5:23; 7:32; 8:23; 16:18; Lk 4:40; Ac 9:12,17;

<sup>13</sup> 1Tim 4:14; 5:22; 2Tim 1:6;

sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”<sup>24</sup> ¶  
Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, *was not with them* when Jesus came.

Nowhere else does it say that Christ breathed on Thomas. So, if a physical act of conveyance was necessary, Thomas never received the Spirit prior to Pentecost. He lacked the power and authority given the others. IS the Spirit physically conveyed by breathing or laying hands on someone? *Of course not*. Turn to Acts 1:4.

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

He was speaking of Pentecost. So if Christ “conveyed” the Holy Spirit by breathing on the apostles, why must they await the Spirit? When he breathed on them, it was to grant them his authority until he sent the Spirit to act in his place (Jn 15). When the Spirit overcame the disciples at Pentecost, hands were not laid on any of them. Yet they showed the very same evidences we see in Acts 8. So, to me at least, it looks like the Spirit is *not* conveyed by the hands of men, but by God, at his discretion. Now, if laying on hands is not done to convey the Spirit, nor for atonement, nor for blessing, nor for healing, then it must be done to consecrate overseers and convey authority to them. Otherwise it runs counter to the rest of Scripture. Sure enough, in 1Tim 4:14, the elders laid hands on Timothy to affirm his gifts and his calling; I submit to you that this is what’s going on in Acts 8, when Simon’s lust for power is aroused. Let’s come to the close quickly. Acts 8, verse 20. Peter responds to Simon’s bribe with this:

Act 8:20 But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the GIFT of God with money!

Let’s assume Simon was saved upon his profession of faith and baptism (though the commentators are split on that). Is Simon *still* saved? Or has he now *lost* his salvation because of this selfish desire? Does “perish” mean his eternal destruction and damnation? The word itself doesn’t tell us. “Perish” means wasting away, like perishable fruit that’s been detached from the tree – or from the Vine. Simon has separated himself from the source of his life. He needs to repent and abide in Christ. Do we know if he was saved? We don’t. But I think he is, even if he is acting hypocritically at this point. Listen to Peter’s exhortation to him:

Act 8:21-23 “You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.”

What matter? Salvation? Or eldership? Was his act any worse than Peter’s three denials? Why should it cost him his salvation? Recall the Last Supper: **John 13:8** Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” *He’s saying Peter would have no part or lot in this matter*. Peter uses the very same caution with Simon. Why would Simon’s “sin” be any different than the apostles who wanted to call down

fire from heaven to strike down those who rejected Christ in Samaria?<sup>14</sup> Weren't they trying to exercise the power of God as if it was their own? What was Eve's sin in the Garden? What was Job castigated for? They all wanted to be privy to God's power, knowledge, and wisdom. They all wanted God to justify Himself to them. They thought God's favor and gifts made them equal to God, and exalted themselves.

You see, the creature often perceives itself as Creator, simply because it has been given charge over some sphere of existence. The servant or ambassador can misperceive himself as Lord, simply because he is acting in behalf of his Lord. He takes for himself what can only belong to the One who sent him. Christ never made that mistake. WE make it all the time – like Simon, we want to act apart from Christ, and outside of his authority. And THAT is where Simon the Magician was coming from. What was his response to Peter's command to repent and pray to God? Did he fall down in sackcloth and ashes like the Ninevites did, fasting and praying, turning from his sin, and begging for mercy? Not at all:

[Act 8:24](#) And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

Simon remains in his flesh, issuing commands to his elders in the faith, instructing them in how to handle the situation, still unwilling to do the work himself, or to submit to those whom God has placed in authority over him. That's what shows he is still in the bonds of iniquity, in the bondage of sin, and in the gaul (poison) of bitterness that drives him to exalt himself. What has made him bitter? We don't know. **What makes US bitter?** Why will he not come before the Lord in prayer? **Why will WE not?** How can he expect to receive intercession, and yet refuse to humble himself under God's mighty hand? **How can WE?** And yet we do.

Too often, we have false expectations with regard to the work of the Spirit in our lives. If we sincerely repent of our sins in response to the Word of God spoken to us, and if we come before God with a contrite heart, He WILL heal us in our souls. *We can expect that.* If we humble ourselves in the sight of God, under his mighty hand, he will exalt us in due time. (Jam 4:10; 1Pet 5:6) I really hope that Simon repented, and prayed, and was set free from his bondage to sin, cleansed of his iniquity and bitterness.

Today, right now, we have that opportunity. We are celebrating Communion, the sign of the fellowship of the Spirit that we enjoy with kindred souls and with God. We don't want to grieve the Spirit with unrepented sin, or with anything that leads to disunity. We don't want to quench the Spirit by refusing to do the work assigned to us, and for which we have been gifted; or by failing to respect and esteem those placed over us in the Lord as the Spirit has determined (1Th 5:12-19). We don't want to profane the table of Christ with such sin. *Once we were his enemies, but now we are seated at his table.* Therefore confess your sins in prayer before you come to the table, and be assured that you will receive mercy and forgiveness. For the debt and penalty for all of it has already been paid on the cross by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Come and eat of his flesh which signifies the Word which he has spoken to you. Drink deeply of the wine which signifies his blood, giving life unto eternity. For without the sacrifice of Christ, which this bread and wine signify, "you have no life in you." *LeChaim!* To Life!

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<sup>14</sup> Lk 9:54