

God Will Not Be Manipulated

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[0 : 00] We carry on, friends, this morning in the Acts of the Apostles. It's been preached on previously by brothers. We're going to read from Acts chapter 8 and the 9th verse, down to verse 25.

Some translations have, for these first verses in the NIV, some translations have now for some time, some have now for many years.

That's important. It's not just some time. Some translations have for many years. Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria.

He boasted that he was someone great. And all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, This man is rightly called the great power of God.

They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. But when they believed Philip, as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

[1 : 25] Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria.

When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them.

They had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money. And he said, Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.

[2 : 35] Peter answered, May your money perish with you because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money. You have no part of sharing this ministry because your heart is not right before God.

Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and a captive to sin.

Then Simon answered, Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me. After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

May God bless to us his word. One of the things, friends, when we're going through the Acts of the Apostles, especially between Acts chapter 1 and Acts chapter 10, is to remember that we're in a transition period.

It's moving from Jerusalem to where the Gentiles are and then Paul goes into Europe.

- [4 : 11] So the commission given to the apostles is that beginning with Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, as in our chapter, and then to the Gentiles, this is a transition period.
- And like any change in your life or mine, and I'm sure some of us here must be going through changes, you need to adapt. You need to adjust.
- And then you adopt. And then you consolidate. Any change at all, small or great, we have to adapt. We have to adjust.
- Then we adopt a new way of looking at things or handling things. And then we consolidate. The change has changed things. From Acts chapter 1 to Acts chapter 10, that is what is happening.
- The Holy Spirit has come at Pentecost. As prophesied. The church in Jerusalem has been established. As run by the apostles, the disciples of Jesus.
- [5 : 23] They are now the apostles, men sent. As God sent the Son, so the Son sent the apostles. And the apostles now have got to fulfill the commission.
- You remember Matthew 28, if you know your Bible. Jesus said to them, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go. Preach the gospel to all nations.
- Make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And Lord, I am with you always, even to the very end of the age.
- Now, in the Holy Spirit's power, they are fulfilling that commission. But it's still in a transition period between Jerusalem and the Gentiles.
- And so, in chapter 10 and 11, Peter, who is here with John from Jerusalem, finally says, as the Holy Spirit comes upon the Gentiles and Cornelius, the man who called for him, he says, it's obvious to us now, the Holy Spirit has come upon the Gentiles, that's the non-Jews, therefore God has no favorites.
- [6 : 38] favorites. God has no favorites. So, this is important when we go to this passage with Simon the sorcerer in Samaria.
- God has no favorites. What we've got to realize is Samaria is made up of the ten tribes of Israel plus other races.
- And at this point, for 750 years, the Jews would not even go through a Samaritan town. They were disgusted with them.
- The Samaritans spoke of Jerusalem as a dunghill. Now, this happened and began 750 years before this.
- When the Assyrian conquerors came upon the north of Israel, they interbred them with the captives from other lands. So, to the Jews in the south, in Judea, and the little tribe of Benjamin, these other ten tribes on the top there for the last 700 years, they are nearly Jews.
- [8 : 08] Half Jews. For these Jewish disciples to go to Samaria wasn't just visiting another geographical location.
- for them to go into Samaria is to go into a place that Peter, James, John, and all the apostles wouldn't have entered if you paid them a fortune because they regarded them as non-Jews or half-Jews.
- this irritating complex animosity between the Jewish tribe and the other ten went for 700 years to this point.
- So, this was no easy task to go to Samaria. It's important we understand the context. Now, as we look at the chapter, you think of Simon the sorcerer.
- I'm going to point out to you the important verse. It's got nothing to do with Simon the sorcerer. Simon the sorcerer is simply an example of the spiritual mess of Samaria that he gets away with what he does.

- [9 : 38] That's all he is. Luke, the historian, Dr. Luke, who wrote the Acts of the Apostles, he brings Simon in to make us aware of the spiritual sewer that Samaria was.
- That they would allow such a man to be called the great power of God. The important verse, friends, is verse 14.
- When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received and accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria.
- That's the important verse of the chapter, not the magician. Don't get carried away with the drama of the magician. That's not what the chapter's about.
- the chapters about the apostles who received the commission from the risen Lord, who had ascended to the father after his resurrection and became, Paul calls in 1 Corinthians 15, a life-giving spirit and blessed them with the Holy Spirit.
- [11 : 03] They were now to begin at Jerusalem, Judea, into Samaria, and that's the last place they wanted to go on earth. It wasn't just a geographical border.
- This was a painful journey because Peter and John would have grown up since they were an infant, full of prejudice and bigotry towards the Samaritans.
- Now they had to do what Jesus did. Do you remember what Jesus did? He went to the Samaritan woman at the well in John chapter 4 and she said to him, what are you doing speaking to me?
- She recognized he was a Jew and they chatted. You don't have anything to drink with.
- You ask for a drink. Oh, but if you ask me for a drink, I could give you living water. Living water?
- [12 : 15] And she begins to realize this man is speaking into her heart and her life. She's a woman who's come to the well at lunchtime, basically, probably because of her lifestyle.
- but after Jesus has spoken to her, she leaves her bucket that she brought and runs away to the village.
- Come see a man who told me about myself. And he stays for two days in Samaria. What's he doing in Samaria?
- Is he not supposed to hate them? After all, they're complicated, compromised Jews. They're not purely Jewish. What's he doing there?
- You see, when Jesus gives the commission to the disciples who become the apostles, they've now to follow Jesus' agenda, not the Jewish agenda.
- [13 : 26] You begin in Jerusalem. Jerusalem but Samaria is next. And because of the two-step pattern that we tend to think about God's plan, the Jews and the Gentiles, must never forget there's another people in between the Jews and the Gentiles.
- And they're called Samaritans. And they're half Jews. And they're bitter against the Jews. And the Jews are bitter against them. But now, they hear in Jerusalem, Philip's preaching because of the persecution in which Stephen died and all started.
- There was no other Christian left in Jerusalem but the apostles. They'd all scattered. Philip's in Samaria. He's preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.
- And he's showing them the name of Jesus, how that links up. and the apostles in Jerusalem, they've received the word of God in Samaria.
- So they assigned the task to Peter and John to go and check it out. Now here's the interesting thing about this.
- [14 : 44] If you look at the passage, it says in verse 16, I'll read from verse 15.

When the apostles arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Here's a fascinating statement. It does not occur again in the Bible, even in the transition period.

Because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them. now they had received the word of God they heard.

They had believed in the name of Jesus and been baptized as believers as we do here. Believing, then baptism.

Why was the Holy Spirit not given to them? This is unique. And you must remember you're not among Gentiles, you're not among Jews, you're among the Samaritans.

[16:00] The third group, the middle group, beginning Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, then the Gentiles. See friends, that's why I say to you to understand this passage, verse 14 is the key verse.

Because the apostolic ministry is to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Now we don't have the apostles now, but we do have the apostolic truth in the New Testament.

The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And they went and they were sent. And in Samaria, they heard the word of God from Philip.

They said they believed in Jesus and they were baptized as believers. But as yet, the Holy Spirit had not come upon them.

this indicates the authority of the apostles and the authority of the word of God.

[17:13] You remember when it came to choosing the deacons, as we call them. They weren't deacons, strictly speaking. You remember the widows, the Greek speaking widows. You've dealt with that with other preachers.

They weren't getting fed the same and looked after the same. So it was the apostles who called the people together and said, choose seven men, Greek speaking Jews.

Not like us, Hebrew speaking Jews, but Greek speaking Jews who can look after the widows. It was the apostles who took that motion, that authority, put that into place.

And then the apostles said, it's not right that we serve tables when we should be preaching the word of God and praying.

And they all agreed. The Holy Spirit spoke to them all as a fellowship. Now here are the apostles coming from Jerusalem to Samaria, to this middle group, half Jews, in all the bigotry and prejudice that they had between them, doing what Jesus did among the Samaritans.

[18:31] And they're coming because they want the Samaritans to appreciate that Simon's influence, the sorcerer, must not be allowed to have the same authority as them believing in Jesus.

See, Samaria was a spiritual mess. Simon's ministry would not have been allowed in Judah. He would have been stoned to death.

The law clearly says, and the last book of our Old Testament, it's ordered differently from the Hebrew Old Testament, says that God would take care of the sorcerers, the adulterers, and so on.

He would never have got away with that in Judah. Why? Because in Judah, in the south, in the line of the messianic prophecies through which Jesus came, they accepted the whole of the Hebrew scripture, but the Samaritans didn't.

The Samaritans only held the first five books of Moses in the Bible as authority to. So the prophecies that began after Deuteronomy, the Samaritans, prophets, priests, and kings, messianic, now forget it, whereas in Judah, they kept to the whole of their Bible, in the Old Testament.

[20 : 17] Peter and John were sent knowing the ignorance of the Samaritans, the superficial understanding they had of the Lord's Word for 700 years.

That takes us back to the 14th century. and they were sent to check that they understood who it was they had come to believe in, why they were baptized, and did they understand the Word of God that Philip preached to them?

or was it just another link, sorcery, scripture, something else, something else, something else?

So when the apostles came, now this being a piece of history in the New Testament, you don't have all the details as to what they said to them, but it simply tells us here, and notice verse 16, they had simply been baptized in the name of Jesus, simply been baptized in the name of Jesus, the Lord Jesus, then it says, Peter and John laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Spirit because Peter and John had checked it out.

Did they understand the Word of God that they believed, that they had said they heard and believed, because they didn't have an appreciation of the scripture that their fellow Jews in Judah had.

[22 : 07] They were a spiritual mess in Samaria, a mess. Anything anybody said, they'd believe, as long as they did a bit of magic. And that's all Simon's mentioned, therefore, that's all.

Don't get hooked into Simon. Simon's just there to show us how poor off spiritually Samaria was, that they said he was a great power of God and they followed him everywhere.

And here's when it comes out now. The man they've been listening to now says to Peter and John, hey, I've got my wallet here with me.

Can I give you some money so that I could have that gift? When I lay my hands on him, you see, that's Samaria for you. It's a mess. Anything goes.

And the Samaritans loved this guy, followed this man, listened to this man, believed this man, all over the region of Samaria.

[23 : 11] Simon, will you hear Peter's rebuke? rebuke. I'm very tempted to use street language, but I'm sure you may be thinking of it yourself.

You and your money shall perish together, he says. To think that you think you could buy the gift of God.

I don't know, you don't know whether Simon was truly, become a Christian. We don't know a person's heart. I don't know your heart, you don't know mine, unless we've come to know each other in the Lord.

Maybe he did get converted, maybe in time he did turn to the Lord. But the Samaritans appreciated what Peter and John did. And friends, when I look at the UK and Europe, I don't liken it to Israel, and I don't liken it to the gentle world.

I liken our country to Samaria, I'm sorry. It's a mess. It's a spiritual sewer. Not just because we disagree with this and we disagree with that, it's all politics and everything's politicized and everything gets messed up.

[24 : 37] But even the church that calls itself the church of Jesus Christ in the West is now immoral, unethical, totally unbiblical.

What are we to do? What are we to do about it? We're to do what Jesus did and the apostles did, and to love our Samaritan.

That's what we're to do. We're to love our Samaritan, whose life is a mixture of all sorts of stuff.

They don't know the difference. They're still in the dark, and this little bit onto my life, and my mind will feel better for that, and my well-being will feel better for that, and I better make sure I read my horoscope today, and I better do this, and I better do that, and then they wonder why they get depressed.

That's what we're to do, the same as the apostles did. Let there be no prejudice, no bigotry.

[25 : 50] That shouldn't be in us as Christians. It was in the Jews till they came to know Christ. It was in the Samaritans till they came to know Christ.

But Jesus made his way through Samaria, and two very unusual people met, a Samaritan woman and a Jewish teacher.

And she knew he cared about her. She knew he was not a biased, bigoted Jew.

The disciples arrived after him, didn't they? What's he doing? Talk to her. How many times have you heard that? They say, are you hungry, Lord?

Are you not hungry? You've not eaten for a while. Listen to Jesus' reply. I think they were trying to change the subject. It's a personal comment.

[26 : 55] Jesus said, I have bread to eat of which you do not know. I am here to do my father's will.

The father's will is if we say we know Christ, there should be no bigotry in us, no prejudice against anyone. That person should be loved as a Samaritan, messed up, their heart and their soul a sewer.

They don't know what the light is unless the light shines. And we should be able to look at them and say, there but for the grace of God, go I.

Nobody, no matter what their behavior is, what their background is, what their beliefs are, if they don't know the Lord, God, I don't care how much religiosity they've got, or how much crazy antics, you might look and think that's madness, we are to love our Samaritan.

That's why the apostles were sent, to bring the light to the gospel that these people heard from Philip because of the persecution, and they're obeying the commission from the risen saviour, go.

[28 : 19] Samaria, don't miss Samaria out, that's going to be painful for you, but I will be with you, I'll never leave you, I'll speak through you, deal with them through you.

I remember someone saying, the apostles could have gone to Samaria, and like busy bees, they could have stung the Samaritans, and the person who wrote that said, but they didn't sting them, they went to make honey.

I love honey. They went to make honey, not to sting the people that they had been reared up since a child to hate, despise, don't go into one of their towns.

If you see them coming, go to the other side of the road. How ugly is that? That's bigotry and prejudice. That should not be in a Christian.

If you're a Christian this morning, born again of the Spirit, the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. there should be no exceptions.

[29 : 55] We're out there to make honey. We're not there to sting them. Does it not tell us in Romans 5 that through the Holy Spirit the love of God has been poured into your hearts?

Where is it? Where is God? That's what we're to do. The apostles were sent to show these people. When they checked it out, were not told everything that happened, they laid their hands on them, they gave them the Holy Spirit in this transition period.

That's what God ordained to happen. God, friends, and I asked Stephen to put this title up in closing, God will not be manipulated. We're not here to manipulate the Word of God.

God, the apostles went to check out in case the Word of God was just put amongst all their magic bits with the sorcerer and all the rest that they had in their spiritual lives.

That was a mess. They were not sent to manipulate or to allow the manipulation of God and His Word. God will not be manipulated.

[31 : 04] If you try to manipulate the Word of God, blessing will not follow. It's God's Word.

We are, if we are His, we are God's church. We are not the kingdom. We are the church. The people called out of the world to represent Him.

That's why Peter and John were sent to enlighten the Samaritans. I stood now. Your life is like this. We're not the kingdom of God.

We are witnesses to the kingdom of God. We are custodians of the gospel of the kingdom of God. We are created by the gospel of the kingdom of God. The church is nothing without it.

We're not the kingdom of God. Manipulating God's Word is completely and utterly wrong. Sadly, in our country and in Europe, the church is going down the drain.

[32 : 17] I'm sorry. There are things being taught and accepted. It's like Samaria. And if I went this morning, probably I never will, but if I went this morning to a church to preach, and I stood up and preached the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus, I could well be objected to in many churches in our land.

So let's not be naive. We're in a spiritual battle. And if you're really the Lord's, wherever you are, as we were saying on Wednesday night at the Bible study, blossom where you're planted.

blossom where you're planted. And love your Samaritan.

Love them the way Jesus loved them. And isn't it interesting that the last verse of our passage says in Acts 8, 25, after they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord, that's the apostles, and testified about Jesus, the apostles' commission, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

What do you think they were saying? Because a Jew would not be near them. But these are now Christian Jews. They now have the Holy Spirit.

[33 : 52] they're doing what Jesus did. And met, as it were, women at the well, men at the river, people in the desert.

And they're telling them the truth as it is in Jesus. Do not be listening to the sorcerers. God, friends, will not be manipulated.

we can become as religious as we like. He knows your heart, and he knows mine. And only the gospel will give you a new heart, a new spirit.

This chapter is a difficult chapter. I didn't find it easy to study. But the Lord showed me what I believe is the key verse. It's a transition period towards the Gentiles.

love. They still have to be loved, no matter what you think of them. Friends, remember and pray for your Samaritan.

[35 : 10] Instead of saying, imagine him doing that. Imagine her doing that. What would you be like without the Lord? Would you be a wonderful person? You'd be doing daft, crazy things as well, spiritually, morally, and thinking it was okay.

They need to be the Lord's. They need to have his name received, the spirit, and they're born again. And they need to know the ruination of sin, and the command to repent, and the redemption offered in Jesus, and then the regeneration by the spirit.

Then they are his. That's why the apostles went out of mercy and compassion. for people they probably would never have met, but avoided for the rest of their life.

But Jesus has given us a golden saving message at his cost. It is finished, he said.

The price for redemption had been paid for everyone on earth. Now they need to know. love your Samaritan. Don't reject him because you don't like them.

[36 : 26] May God bless us. Father in heaven, there is in our country and in the world at the moment, a terrible greed, Lord.

God, there is a love of money that's gone beyond reason, Father. It's gone beyond anything any of us have ever known.

There is a greed to have, to have, to have, to have, love. As though somehow, having pots of money makes us a different person, makes us a better person, a more powerful person.

And Father, I remember your servant Charles Spurgeon, he was offered a thousand dollars for every appearance by an American circus owner because the circus owner from America knew that Charles Spurgeon could draw a crowd.

And Charles Spurgeon wrote back and said, Dear Sir, my answer is in Acts 8, the words of Peter to Simon, Yours sincerely, C.H.

[37 : 45] Spurgeon. Father God, help us, we pray, to be authentic believers, authentic believers, who believe in you, who trust you, who live for you, and not manipulate and think we can ever get a way with manipulating your word to our advantage or anybody else's advantage.

It is for your glory we are to live and to you be all the glory. In Jesus' name, Amen. God bless you.

I'll hand over to our young singers. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.