Over the past week and a half, during by personal devotional times with the Lord, I was reminded of both the humility and empowered authority that comes from the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. **Acts 19:6-7** says, “And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all.” This scene is unique and important in our understanding of both church history and biblical doctrine. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the 120 Jewish disciples (men & women) gathered in the upper room at Pentecost… the first instance of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit accompanied by the miraculous sign of speaking in tongues (known languages). The second occurrence was among the Samaritans, viewed by the Jews as cultural 'half-breeds'. In that instance, it happened by the laying on of hands by lead Apostles Peter and John. As the gospel crossed further cultural barriers to reach the Gentiles. The Apostle Peter laid hands on the new Gentile believers, in the Roman centurion Cornelius' house, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. NOW, in **Acts 19**, the Apostle Paul, lays hands on 12 believers and they are filled with the Holy Spirit and speak a d tongues. This was the same authenticating sign that was previous seen. I believe this happened for two reasons, and why we don't see this being repeated afterward: 1) it was an external authentication of Paul's

Apostleship and thus, his authority as a New Testament author, and 2) that correct doctrine alone is insufficient to live the victorious Christian life... correct understanding without Holy Spirit empowerment is ultimately impotent carnality. I believe that no other such occurrences are recorded in scripture as to protect Christ-followers from becoming human gatekeepers, who could hinder the gospels rapid expansion. Gatekeeping of power leads to pride and control. Holy Spirit will not be bound, even though He operates in and through order and structures of accountability to protect doctrinal purity; and pride is expressly in opposition to Christ-like humility.

The second passage, **Acts** 21:24, involves Paul engaging in financial and practical actions of Jewish ritual purification at the Temple. This passage is intriguing for several reasons. James and the other elders of the Jerusalem Church are addressing a specific dilemma in a specific cultural context, while acknowledging a doctrinal truth of salvation by grace through faith. The dilemma is due to the cultural customs of religious Judaism. The church in Jerusalem, was mostly, if not entirely, composed of Jewish believers in Jesus... which makes sense. Consequently, their culture and customs were still very much linked to the ceremonial law. The big question, that was also asked by the Gentile believers, was, "**is there room for different**

cultural expressions of the Christian faith?" The answer is "yes" for both Jews and Gentiles. Gentiles did not HAVE TO **start** practicing Jewish ceremonial law and Jews did not HAVE TO **stop** practicing Jewish ceremonial law. In the same way that Gentiles were not being forced into a particular cultural mold, Jews were not being force out of a particular cultural mold. Same doctrine, different expressions. For us today, we should apply the same principles... in the essentials, show unity, in the non-essentials, show liberty, and in all things show love and extend grace. Say YES to loving others and NO to compromising on truth. Style of dress and style of worship music (or any other cultural expressions or preferences) should not be a source of division. In those instances, it does not constitute compromise to humbly adapt to local customs. This is not new information; however, it merits periodic reflection and revisitation to avoid the extremes of cultural isolationism and doctrinal syncretism.

Blessings! Jeff