

ACTS  
Philip and Simon Magus  
Acts 8:9-25

Do you know a counterfeit Christian when you see one? Are you able to discern the difference between a genuine Christian and a false one? Do you know the difference between a true teacher and an apostate teacher?

In Acts 8:9-25 we have a contrast between two men. Simon Magus who represents mere profession of faith in Christ, and Philip, the deacon and evangelist, who represents true possession of Christ. Philip received Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and sought to follow Christ by preaching Christ to others. His message of Christ had a ring of authority and truth and the Samaritans were paying attention to what he had to say. Simon Magus, we shall learn, also believed in Jesus Christ, was baptized, and yet he did not follow Christ and lived only for himself. Simon was a professor, a phony, who was a hypocrite and an apostate from the Christian Faith. Simon was the first apostate from Christianity, and the first religious racketeer in the Christian church. Simon had a faith in Christ but this faith did not save him.

The case of Simon Magus shows us again how the Devil seeks to divide Christians from within. The Devil's first attempt was in the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira. His second attempt was to cause dissension among the widows in the local church at Jerusalem who felt they were being neglected. Now in the case of Simon Magus, we have another attempt to destroy the work of Christ. The Devil sows tares among the wheat in that a false Christian gets embedded with true Christians.

PERSON OF SIMON (Acts 8:9a)

“Now there was a certain man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city, and astonishing the people of Samaria, . . .” -- Simon Magus or Simon the Sorcerer (wizard or enchanter) was probably an apostate Jew who mixed the religion of Judaism with the magic arts of the Magi. The Magi, originated in Persia and devoted themselves to the study of astronomy, medicine, and philosophy. As their art degenerated, they gave themselves over to sorcery, evil magic and witchcraft. They were deeply involved in the reading of the stars, horoscopes, the occult and the use and control of evil spirits. The magic spoken of here in Acts is not slight-of-hand tricks. Rather it applies to the use of demonic powers to accomplish what appears to be wholesome miracles. Simon Magus had such great power at his disposal that he was astonishing or bewitching the whole city of Samaria.

In the western world today, we are having an upsurge of fortune tellers, horoscope readers, the occult and Satan worship. It is not uncommon for people to live by the horoscope and the predictions of people like Jeanne Dixon and Morice Woodruff. Christians, however, are to have absolutely nothing to do with the horoscope, occult or Satan worship.

“When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you” (Deut. 18:9-12).

“Do not turn to mediums or spiritists; do not seek them out to be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God” (Lev. 19:31).

“As for the person who turns to mediums and to spiritists, to play the harlot after them, I will also set my face against that person and will cut him off from among his people” (Lev. 20:6).

#### POSITION OF SIMON (Acts 8:9b)

“Claiming to be someone great; . . .” -- Simon was a braggart, a boaster, obsessed with his own greatness. He made mighty claims about his own person and powers. He was the first century Mohammed Ali who went around saying, “I am the greatest; I am the greatest.” Simon was his own P. R. man for he was able to cast a spell over the people to make them think he was someone great. He undoubtedly had great powers of persuasion.

What a contrast between the false and the true. Philip preached Christ, Simon preached himself. Philip evangelized with the truth of the gospel. Simon amazed people with his tricks. Philip told men of the great Savior who died and rose again from the dead for sinners and who gives forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all who believe in Him. Simon preached that men were to believe in him and his programs. There are multiple thousands of people today who follow men rather than Christ. People follow the so-called faith healers. They follow the Rev. Sun Myung Moon who claims to be the Messiah. They follow Joseph Smith or Mary Baker Eddy. There are always phonies, false teachers and religious racketeers who get a following because they are dynamic personalities with the power to persuade people. One reason they are so successful is that they have the demons working for them.

#### POPULARITY OF SIMON (Acts 8:10, 11)

“And they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, ‘This man is what is called the Great power of God.’ And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts.” -- Simon Magus was the most popular man in town. The populace worshipped him either as a power from God or God Himself. They probably came to believe that God had incarnated Himself in Simon Magus. Perhaps Simon was the Samaritan Messiah to answer the claims of Jesus Christ, the true Messiah. Whatever, Simon had the city in the palm of his hand. They were under his spell.

#### PROFESSION OF SIMON (Acts 8:12, 13)

“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.” -- The gospel came to the superstitious Samaritans with their horoscopes, witches and beads through the deacon and evangelist, Philip. Philip may have been the greatest preacher of his day and he was only a deacon. He was not ordained. He was not a professional clergyman. He was a layman called to preach the gospel. The gospel came to Samaria and great numbers of people were turning from their witchcraft and turning to Jesus Christ. The truth of Jesus Christ was capturing souls for heaven because whenever the gospel is preached men will be saved. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

“And even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip; and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.” -- Simon was apparently caught up in the spirit of revival and he made some kind of act of faith in Christ and was even baptized. We do not know exactly why Simon believed but it is not too hard to deduce. First, Simon knew a real miracle worker when he saw one and he wanted the power to work miracles that he saw in Philip. Second, he probably felt that if he did not join up with Philip and the Christian movement, his business would be hurt. Whatever his motives were for coming to Christ, they were not genuine. His profession was made because he thought it would prove advantageous to himself, and he was never concerned about the redemption of his own soul. Simon was probably sincere as far as he understood but there was no real commitment to Jesus Christ. His faith was in miracles and not in Jesus Christ, the Savior. Simon was never regenerated by God; he was a fraud and sham. Simon went through all the external exercises he thought were necessary to become a Christian, but he

was unchanged. His heart beat only for Simon and not for Christ as the rest of this account will make perfectly clear. Simon was even able to deceive Philip. He attached himself to Philip as is usually the case, for a new convert to Christ attaches to the person who led him to Christ. Perhaps Philip was like many evangelists in our day. He may have lacked spiritual discernment and was a little naive in that he was not willing to wait patiently for the fruit to flow from Simon's life so there would be definite proof of his conversion. Spurgeon said, "The mark of an unregenerate heart is an unchanged life." Arthur Pink said, "How you begin salvation in this life is not nearly as important as how you end up salvation at the end of life." Whatever the reasons, Simon was able to con and fool Philip as to his real spiritual state.

What an important conversion this was. This was Simon Magus, the Devil's ace man in Samaria. He was Mr. Pagan himself. He was the leading figure in this city. Perhaps this even worked on Philip's pride a little. Simon was up to this point probably the greatest catch for Christ in the first century. His so-called conversion can be compared to the so-called conversion of Larry Flynt of the famed pornographic magazine "Hustler." This was a super catch for Christ. Yet, Simon believed but he had not believed. He had a faith that did not save.

Becoming a Christian is not done by any external acts - walking an aisle, raising a hand, signing a card, praying a stereotyped prayer, being baptized, having a religious experience such as speaking in tongues or having a vision. Externals save no one. Only those who trust in Christ to save them from their sins are truly saved.

Simon was an unbeliever who got into the local church. Local churches and whole denominations have been weakened and rendered ineffective by unregenerate people coming in, taking the outer garments of Christianity, calling themselves Christians, but remaining unchanged in heart and life.

Right after my oldest son, Mark, was saved I often referred to his new found faith in Christ as a profession. One evening Mark took me aside and said, "Dad, I have not professed. I have received Christ and possess Christ." I said, "I accept your profession, Mark, and I believe it to be real, but we must wait to see if genuine fruit appears in your life before we can say that conversion has taken place." He did not like my explanation. Then he went to college, a Christian college, and discovered how many kids in that college had professed Christ but showed no fruit of salvation in their lives. When Mark came home from college, he said, "Dad, I'm sure glad you called my initial belief in Christ a profession and waited for fruit to come. I now know it is possible to have some kind of superficial faith in Christ that is not saving faith because so many kids at college are just playing the game."

How many Christians make a profession of faith for wrong reasons and with wrong motivations. Businessmen mouth words about Christ and join a church to sell their products. Women say they are Christians to be in a high society church to give them recognition and prestige. A guy will make some profession of faith in order to get some gal to go out with him or even marry him. God always knows the motivations of the heart.

#### POURING OUT OF THE SPIRIT ON THE SAMARITANS (Acts 8:14-17)

"Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John, . . ." -- Philip undoubtedly got word back to the Apostles, telling them that a great turning to Christ had taken place in Samaria. People were being converted right and left. The news of the conversion of Simon Magus also hit the Christian headquarters in Jerusalem. When the Apostles received the news, perhaps they were a little skeptical about those glowing reports from Samaria, so they wanted to know if the situation was real or was just an exaggerated evangelistic report by Philip who was trying to impress them with numbers and big names. Whatever the situation, the Apostles sent Peter and John to Samaria to give a firsthand Apostolic report.

"Who came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For he had not yet fallen on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit." -- This verse at face value seems to teach that the

Samaritans received the Holy Spirit after they believed. Can a person be saved without the Holy Spirit? Was this some second work of grace? This is a very difficult verse and in some ways it does not fit my own theology, even though I have an explanation for it.

View #1: Second Experience After Conversion

This is the traditional Pentecostal-Charismatic view. These folks believe that a person is saved and receives the Spirit for salvation at that time, but then a person must receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit sometime later for sanctification and the manifestations of the Spirit, namely the gift of tongues. This baptism is received by the laying on of hands.

View #2: Delay of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit to Put the Samaritans into the Body of Christ

The book of Acts is a book of transition from the Old Testament dispensation to the New Testament dispensation. The Samaritans were half-breeds, half-caste, who were not fully Jewish. They had their own rival worship system to Jerusalem. The Jews and the Samaritans hated one another and both claimed to be the true followers of Jehovah-God. There was, therefore, a need to delay, in this particular case, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, putting these Samaritan believers into the body of Christ, so as to avoid two rival factions in the Christian church. The Samaritans had the Holy Spirit because they believed in Christ and they were regenerate, but they were not yet put into the body of Christ. They were still separate, individual, regenerate Christians, much like the Apostles and the one hundred twenty had been before the Day of Pentecost. There was a need to make a connection between the believers in Samaria and the believers in Jerusalem. Therefore, the Apostles Peter and John laid hands on them, identifying them with the Apostolic ministry and at that time they were put into the Body of Christ. Had this not been the case, the Samaritans may have thought that their brand of Christianity was distinct from the brand in Jerusalem, and there would have been two churches which would have destroyed the unity of the infant church. There is no specific mention of tongues in this context, although there may have been the special gifts of the Spirit bestowed at this time (including tongues) because Simon saw some kind of manifestation when hands were laid on the Samaritans.

If tongues were present, we must remember they were a sign to unbelieving Jews and they were to be a testimony to unbelievers about the truthfulness of the Apostolic message. Tongues are never a sign to believers but to unbelievers.

PROPOSITION OF SIMON (Acts 8:18, 19)

“Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of hands, he offered them money, saying ‘Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit;’” -- Simon was deeply impressed with the manifestations of the Spirit he saw come on the Samaritans and he wanted the same power to lay hands on people. He was even willing to pay a handsome price for this power. Of course, his motivation was monetary gain, and he knew that if he could possess the power given to the Apostles, his influence would increase and, charging outrageous prices, he could confer this same power upon others and multiply his fortune. The spiritual blindness and ignorance of Simon were now beginning to manifest themselves. Given enough time a true phony will declare himself. Simon insulted the Apostles and God by suggesting that the gift and the power of the Holy Spirit, made available through Christ, could be bought with money. Simon understood absolutely nothing about God's sovereignty in giving the gift of salvation by grace. “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast;” (Eph. 2:8, 9). He was a total stranger to grace, for he was convinced that God's gifts could be worked for or bought. This proposition of Simon's showed the real heart of the man. He was a professor, not a possessor; counterfeit, not genuine. His lust for power, prestige and money finally got the best of him, and by his actions, not his words, he declared himself a non-Christian. He was a religious racketeer who used Christian things to make a profit.

From Simon we get the word "simony" which is the sin of trying to buy religious office and/or power with money, a very common practice in the history of the church.

## PERVERSION OF SIMON (Acts 8:10-23)

“But Peter said to him, ‘May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!’” -- Simon propositioned the wrong man. Peter was a rough and tough fisherman who did not care about money and he hated religious bribes. Literally the Greek says, “Perdition take your silver” or “To hell with your silver.” What Peter was saying was “You and your money are both going to hell if you do not change your attitude.” Thank God for men like Peter who do not compromise truth for money. What a temptation money is to preachers today. Someone asked his minister what he wanted for his church and he said, “More members and more money!” Members and money are needed to carry on the Lord’s work but they should never influence a preacher to compromise truth.

“You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.” -- The Apostle Peter, who had the gift of discernment, made it emphatically clear to Simon that he had no portion of God's grace in his heart, that he was in no sense a partaker of salvation nor possessor of the Holy Spirit. Simon had believed in Christ in an intellectual way but his heart was unchanged. God alone knows a man’s heart. “. . . for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (I Sam. 16:7). This one act of Simon brought forth his real character. It showed the true condition of his heart. Jesus said, “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16). God knows the heart and men can only be fruit inspectors. Because Simon had an unchanged heart, he manifested the works of the flesh. He was a phony, a fake, a fraud, pretending to be something he was not.

The tragedy is that Simon thought he was a Christian. He had given intellectual assent to Christ but had never committed his life to Christ. He was religious but not regenerated. He had gone through all the external things to be a Christian but his heart was unchanged. He was near the kingdom but far from it. He was almost a Christian but was Christless. He was nearly persuaded, but was not persuaded. Simon had his faith in miracles, in baptism, in Philip and even in himself but he did not have genuine faith in Christ and never committed his life to Him.

There are many people today in churches who have their faith in baptism, confirmation, church membership and good works but this faith does not save a soul from destruction. Men may also have faith in the doctrine of eternal security (a biblical truth) and not in Jesus Christ. Doctrine does not save; only Christ saves. Those who truly believe in Jesus Christ will have a changed heart and desire the things of God. The mark of a regenerate heart is a changed life.

“Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.” -- Peter called upon Simon to repent which is always used of salvation in the book of Acts. Simon was to change his mind about his sin and present lifestyle and turn to Christ for forgiveness and a new kind of lifestyle. He was to repent and pray. He was to change his mind about God, about Christ and about sin and he was to ask God to forgive him. Notice it was God's prerogative to forgive or not forgive because he says, “if possible.” Who does the Lord forgive? All those who with a right intention of heart see themselves sinners, under God's wrath, and headed for hell, and turn to Christ and ask for forgiveness. God reads the intention of the heart, and if there is true salvation, there will be proof through spiritual works flowing through the life of the Christian.

“For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.” -- Simon, with the act of trying to buy God's free gift with money, indicated he knew nothing of salvation. This is not a state that Simon lapsed back into but a state he was still in. He was still in bondage to sin; he was enslaved to iniquity. He had never been set free. Simon was a baptized church member who was enslaved to sin because he had never really committed his life to Jesus Christ whom to know is life eternal.

“Mistaken souls, that dream of Heaven,  
And make their empty boast  
Of inward joys and sins forgiven,

While they are slaves to lust!

Vain are our fancies, airy flights,  
If faith be cold and dead;  
None but a living power unites  
To Christ, the living head.

A faith that changes all the heart;  
A faith that works by love;  
That bids all sinful joys depart,  
And lifts the thoughts above.

Faith must obey our Father's will,  
As well as trust His grace;  
A pardoning God is jealous still  
For His own holiness.”

#### PETITION OF SIMON (Acts 8:24)

“But Simon answered and said, ‘Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said come upon me.’” -- Peter had just told Simon he had to repent and pray to God himself if he was to be saved, but here Simon asked Peter to pray for him. Simon had no real conviction about his sin so as to ask God to have mercy on his sinful soul. He asked Peter to pray that judgment and hell would not come upon him. Simon did not want to go to hell but he also did not want to deal with his sin. He wanted deliverance from the consequences of sin but he did not want to face his sins honestly before God. Simon wanted Christ as Savior but not as Lord. He wanted to be a disciple but did not want discipleship. He wanted heaven but refused to deal with his sin.

Peter could not forgive Simon’s sins and Simon refused to make a personal commitment to Christ. God alone can forgive sins, not a preacher, not a priest, not the Virgin Mary, but only Christ forgives sins as the sinner repents and prays for forgiveness.

#### PLIGHT OF SIMON

Simon Magus is not mentioned again after Acts 8 but I have no doubt that unless he repented, he is in hell today. Extra-biblical literature does tell us about Simon Magus. In the apocryphal books, Simon is spoken of as being the father of the Gnostic heresy. Wherever he went he opposed the gospel violently. He became the arch-apostate from the Christian Faith. He hated everything about Christ. What a tragedy. This man was at the very threshold of salvation, but instead of taking that final step of turning to Christ, he turned away from Christ and continued in the bonds of iniquity. He was close to the kingdom but not in. He was an almost Christian.

#### PREACHING THE GOSPEL (Acts 8:25)

“And so, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.” -- Apparently Peter, John and Philip went back to Jerusalem, evangelizing other Samaritan cities on their way home.

One just senses that these early Christians were totally convinced that God would supernaturally work as they went about preaching the gospel. They knew people would be saved. “And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region” (Acts 13:48, 49).

#### CONCLUSION

Are you like Simon Magus? Have you believed in Christ but have no changed heart? The Bible says you are lost because your faith is superficial and intellectual. Are you an almost Christian? Almost persuaded but not committed? The Bible says you are lost. Have you accepted Christ as Savior but never bowed to Him as Lord? The Bible says you are lost. Are you one who desires to escape hell and go to heaven but are not willing to conform to Christ and deal with your sin? The Bible says you are lost. Are you a phony, a counterfeit, a sham and a pretender? The Bible says, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!" (II Cor. 13:5)

If you are not a Christian, you have either not placed your faith and trust in Christ alone for salvation or you have not surrendered to Him as King. You can miss salvation at either place. The evidence that you have found Christ's salvation is that your faith results in a changed lifestyle. Any other kind of faith is not true saving faith. Have you come to that place where you can honestly say as the hymn writer of Jesus, Lover of My Soul, "Other refuge have I none; hangs my helpless soul on Thee."