

False Faith Contrasted With True Faith ~ Part I

The Example of Simon the Magician

(Acts 8:9-24)

Introduction:

1. In this next section of Scripture (Specifically Acts 8:9-40) we are going to explore the faith of two unique individuals:
 - **Simon the Sorcerer/Magician** whose interest in the Gospel appeared to be for personal gain. In fact; within first century writings you will find a great deal of tradition and speculation about his life and efforts. Some traditions allege that he:
 - 1) Created and established the _____ heresies
 - 2) Spent time in Rome where (along with others) perverted Christian doctrine.
 - 3) Continued to compete with the Apostles in the area of performing miracles even though unsuccessful.
 - The other character we will look at is the Ethiopian Eunuch whose interest in the Gospel was pure. Although he was a “high official” in the court of the Ethiopian Queen, he saw a need to humble himself before God as opposed to exploiting the benefits of following Him.
2. There is a clear distinction in the faith of these two men that we want to carefully look at. Our goal is not to stand in judgment over their intentions, motives, and actions; but to more fully understand how we can be certain that true faith saves! **For if it doesn't then God help us all!**

3. To better understand this we need to recognize that whenever the Gospel is preached it is capable of producing both a “**false faith**” (*a faith that does not save*) as well as a “**true faith**” (*a faith that does save*).
 - The seed (the Word of God) is capable of falling on good soil as well as bad. (Matthew 13:1-23)
 - There will be branches that abide in the vine and those that do not and are cut off. (John 15:1-11, see also Matthew 7:17-23, Matthew 12:33-37)
 - There will be houses built on sand that will collapse and be ruined while others are built on the rock and will survive. (Matt. 7:24-27)
 - There will be sheep together with wolves and in some instances wolves that try to look like sheep but in the end they are still wolves and as such will be destroyed. (Matthew 7:15)
 - There will be tares among wheat (Matthew 13:24-43)
 - There will be those with a “working faith” (Philippians 2:12) and those with a “demon faith”. (James 2:19)
 - There will be those who “have faith to the preserving of the soul” and those who “shrink back to destruction”. (Hebrews 10:39)
4. Perhaps in the case of Simon Magus; it is an example of Satan attempting to sow a “tare” among the wheat.
 - Simon may well have “looked like a believer” but perhaps his faith was not genuine which would seem to explain his actions that were not in line with the behavior of a follower of Christ.
 - 1) Philip didn’t detect it for he continued to work right along side of Simon.
 - 2) It took Peter to see through his masked hypocrisy

- I suppose a question to ask is; where did Simon go wrong? How could he taste of the truth and yet miss its application to his life? I am going to do something very unusual (ha ha) and use John MacArthur's points from his Commentary on Acts to help answer those questions. John feels that this passage reveals four glaring, massive faults in Simon's theology (Taken from *John MacArthur's Commentary on Acts page 239*):
 - 1) "He had a wrong view of self"
 - 2) "He had a wrong view of salvation"
 - 3) "He had a wrong view of the Spirit"
 - 4) "He had a wrong view of sin"
- "It was these faults, according to MacArthur; that kept him from genuine faith and left him in a position to perish eternally".
- In the end I am not sure we can properly judge Simon's life but in much the same way that Demas left the faith and therefore revealed he was never a part of it (I Timothy 4:3-4, 10, I John 2:5-6, 18-20); leads me to conclude that Simon's later actions do not show the fruit of a follower of Christ.
 - 1) In instances like this passage in Acts; I recognize that God's grace abounds, but I also feel compelled not to test His grace nor misapply it.
 - 2) In the end we need not worry about Simon Magus for he will be judged the same as you and I! We will all one day stand before God (Matthew 7:21-23) and the guaranteed redemption is the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7) to those who accept it, and the present pledge of that inheritance is the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). In the end the words we really want to hear are "well done good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:14-30)

“A Wrong View of Self” (Acts 8:9-11)

1. What we see here in Acts 8:9 is a man (named Simon) whose life was wrapped up in _____, where he along with others considered himself _____.
 - People who listened to him were _____ and he seemed to have some external control over their lives.
 - How did Simon cause his listeners to be amazed at his words?
 - How did the people react to Simon? What sort of things did they say about him?
 - How did Simon react to all of this attention?
2. With all of this attention that Simon was receiving it is easy to see that he thought himself to be something.
 - We know that “he claimed to be someone great” and thus conclude that his view of himself was probably that he was better than others.....a rather prideful opinion or feeling that he was basically good and in need of nothing.
 - 1) John MacArthur warns; “Any view of man as basically good and capable of earning acceptance with God deadens people to the reality of God’s impending judgment and blinds them to the need of a Savior. Those who fail to see themselves as sinners will see no need for a Savior”. (John MacArthur; Commentary on Acts page 240)
 - 2) How does Isaiah describe our standing before God? (Isaiah 64:6)

3. Simon's livelihood was in the _____ arts
- The field of magic is pretty broad but most of what was known at that time came from the priests of the "Medo-Persian" region who we commonly refer to as _____.
 - 1) Their teachings and beliefs centered on a blend of science and superstition.
 - 2) They attempted to merge or reconcile the fields of astrology, divination, and various forms of occultic practices with known or factual systems such as history, mathematics, agriculture.
 - 3) This attempt to merge known fact with superstition and or assumption leads to all sorts of error because it is built on a faulty foundation.
 - It is probable that Simon wanted to acquire "more greatness" by learning from the words of Philip.
 - 1) Those who practiced magic are always trying to learn the secrets of the other magicians, so perhaps that was Simon's motivation in following Philip.
 - 2) In the same way that Satan used Judas as an evil instrument to betray Christ, perhaps in this case as well; he is using Simon's perverted view of himself (pride) to become an instrument of destruction in the early church.
 - 3) Many of the writings of the early church leaders identify Simon as the founder of Gnosticism and even go on to claim he had an almost divine view of himself – as he thought himself as "God incarnate". This "Gnosticism" became an enormous threat to the church and caused great turmoil for many centuries. It even remains to this day as an imminent threat!

4. The fact remains that as long as Simon thought himself to be great he would be incapable of obtaining the grace of God. (James 4:1-17, specifically verse 6)
 - We must see ourselves as helpless without God in order to obtain salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9, James 4:6-10).
 - Pride is something that may even appear to be good but it has always doomed a person to hell. (Luke 18:9-14)
5. “Only the humble, aware of their inadequacies and shortcomings, have that sense of lostness that drives them to God. It is the poor in spirit, not the proud in heart who experience saving faith (Matthew 5:3). Nothing short of a true estimate of ones wretchedness, and a broken and contrite heart coupled with a longing for forgiveness, prepare the soul for salvation. (John MacArthur, Commentary on Acts – page 242)

“A Wrong View of Salvation” (Acts 8:12-13)

1. Notice the contrast here in these verses:
 - Simon’s magic was no match for the working of the Spirit of God
 - 1) The secular, humanistic approach, no matter how it tries will always fall short of God. (Romans 3:10, 23)
 - 2) In the end Simon’s magical art was just a fake at best, and found itself wanting.
 - The powerful working of the Holy Spirit changes lives
 - 1) People (even Simon himself) believed, were baptized and followed the teachings of the apostles.
 - 2) It was the message of the Gospel not the working of man (i.e. Simon) that moved them to respond. In the end it is God’s Words that change lives not mans empty promises.

2. Here are some further contrasts between Simon and Philip worth noting (Taken from the Bible Knowledge Commentary – Volume 2 page 373):
 - Both performed _____
 - 1) “Simon by _____ power”
 - 2) “Philip by _____ power”
 - Both were acknowledged and recognized by the people
 - 1) “Simon boasted and welcomed acclaim to _____”
 - 2) “Philip proclaimed _____ and not himself”
 - “The people were amazed at Simon’s _____, but were converted to Philip’s _____”.
3. We are told here that Simon himself believed, was baptized, and followed Philip. (Acts 8:13)
4. Was Simon a true believer, a follower of Christ, a Christian? Since these are all synonymous terms; I will list some observations that you will find in most conservative commentaries that help to answer that question:
 - Some Commentators claim that Luke really doesn’t make it abundantly clear in this particular text so we might do well to say we don’t really know for sure. In the event that does not satisfy you then you are probably not in the minority for this text often confuses people. So let’s continue with some further probing....
 - Although we are told he “**believed**” (*pisteuo*); that verb does not always refer to “saving faith” and may simply mean some sort of **intellectual assent**. We know this is possible for even the demons make such an intellectual affirmation. (**James 2:19**)

- Another possible answer is related to what was his faith actually in?
 - 1) *Was it in Jesus or was it in the actual signs performed by Philip?*
 - 2) Even Jesus will speak to this trusting in signs as not the right kind of faith (**John 2:23-25, 4:48**). When you observe these same people; they are waving palm branches in the air shouting **Hosanna to the King** when Jesus entered the city on what we refer to as Palm Sunday.....not long afterwards some of those same people are found shouting “**crucify him**”! Obviously many of those folks merely made an intellectual assent of belief for they in turn reject Him.
- Another possible reason is that Luke does not record Simon ever receiving the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:17-18)
- Another possible reason is Simon appeared to continue in his self centeredness by seeking to obtain the same power of the apostles and such was immediately acknowledged by Peter as a rather selfish request (Acts 8:18-19). It seems that Luke chooses to expose him as a charlatan (a fake) instead of a true follower.
- Look closely at the request by Peter in verse 22; He charged him to “**repent of this wickedness**”. This word repent (*metanoeo*) is normally addressed to lost people.
- Even Peter’s use of the word “**perish**” (*eis apoleian*) in verse 20 carries the same weight of that same word found in John 3:16. This would seem to imply that Peter recognized his falsehood.
- The final one for me is the description of Simon in Acts 8:23 which seems to apply to someone who is lost rather than saved. All in all God knows who His children are. (II Timothy 2:19)

5. All of this attention on Simon's wrong view of salvation distracts us from the blessing of "true faith". There were others who are identified as sincere in their belief. (Acts 8:12, 14-17)
- In short, the preaching of Philip caused many to believe in Christ; "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". (Acts 8:12)
 - 1) When the apostles taught about the "**kingdom of God**" they were referencing **God's sovereign control/rule over the entire sphere of salvation** which was made up of individuals who belong to Him through faith in Jesus Christ. See the teachings by Jesus regarding the "kingdom" found in **Matthew 5-7**.
 - 2) The other significant component of Philip's message was the proclamation of the **name of Jesus Christ** which was central to the teaching of the apostles. We know this because of the continued teaching that Jesus is the "**only Way**" into that kingdom. (**John 14:6, Acts 4:12**)
 - What we witness taking place here is that many Samaritans (who were once alienated from the "commonwealth of Israel") would become welcomed into that kingdom through faith in Jesus – the Messiah!
 - 1) This faith in Jesus produced the natural outward action of _____, of which both women and men participated.
 - 2) Later we will witness the confirmation of their faith by the laying on of hands by the Apostles in which these Samaritans will receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17).
 - Simon himself is sort of negatively impacted; for those who were once following him, are now following Philip.

6. Some observations regarding Simon and his decision to follow along with Philip (Acts 8:13)

- Clearly his popularity is on the decrease as Philip's is increasing
- One possible conclusion for Simon's decision to believe, be baptized, and continue to associate himself with Philip; was that he wanted to learn the secrets of Philip's power. Later in this text Peter will rebuke Simon for his actions of seeking this "power" for his own selfish desires.
- By remaining with Philip, Simon could continue to sustain contact with the people who were once enamored by him.
- Perhaps by learning of the Apostles powers he could make a comeback and win them back to himself.
- **John MacArthur in his Commentary on Acts – page 243;** concludes that "Simon's view of salvation was purely ritualistic and external, for true faith brings about a total transformation of the whole person on the inside not the outside." (II Corinth. 5:17)
 - 1) "Faith that does not transform the life is not saving faith" (James 2:14, 17-18)
 - 2) "The demons have faith and yet are not saved" (James 2:19). "They believe, and even tremble, but do not love righteousness and hate sin – the evidence of salvation".
 - 3) "Even the people mentioned in John 2:23-25 were not saved by their shallow faith."
 - 4) "Simon believed in the signs but not in the One whose power was behind them. True salvation is not mere profession or ritual act. It is the divine transformation of the soul from love of self to love of God, from love of sin to love of holiness".

A Wrong View of the Spirit (Acts 8:14-20)

1. First let's address the obvious impact that this text has on our understanding of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
 - It is our understanding and teaching that the Holy Spirit baptizes, indwell, and seal the believer at the moment of faith in Christ. (Romans 8:9, I Corinthians 12:13)
 - Why was it necessary for Peter and John to come to Samaria and lay hands on these new believers (Samaritans) in order for them to receive the Holy Spirit? Why was there a delay in receiving the Holy Spirit?
 - 1) Many Commentators conclude that since this was the first real significant “evangelical thrust” outside of Jerusalem; this outward act of the Apostles laying hands on them made a direct connection between what they were doing in Jerusalem and what Philip was doing in Samaria.
 - 2) It was as much of a confirmation to those in Jerusalem that this was of God as it was for those coming to faith there in the region of Samaria. We'll see this again when Saul converts to Christ and the need for those in Jerusalem to be sure he is the real deal – which Barnabas will fully endorse as true!
 - 3) Another reason for this affirmation by Peter and John was to sanction Philips' ministry to the Samaritans.
 - 4) Most conclude (see the Bible Knowledge Commentary – Volume 2 page 373) that “the most important aspect of God withholding the Spirit until the apostolic representatives came from the Jerusalem church was to prevent schism”. With Peter and John officially welcoming the Samaritans into the family it avoided future conflict and broke down existing barriers.

- Our current understanding of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is that such occurs at the moment of salvation. (I Corinthians 12:13, Romans 8:9-10, Ephesians 1:13-14)
 - 1) The Book of Acts is full of so many transitional events and this will not be the last instance where we see the necessity of laying on of hands by the Apostles in order for “others” (i.e. disciples of John the Baptist) to receive the Holy Spirit.
 - 2) God designed one church that was made up of both Jew and Gentile (Galatians 3:28), and the need for One Authority (Jesus Christ) that was represented by one message (proclaimed by the Apostles) became the means by which unity was preserved in the person of the Holy Spirit. Thus the need in some cases to outwardly signify that authority through the laying on of hands by the Apostles to ensure everyone (Jew & Gentile) saw and heard the same thing.....thus a divided church was avoided.
 - 3) As a side note – we may find “other divisions” (to our shame) within the modern church but as Christians we are unified in one thing and that is “Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life and no man comes to the Father but by Him”. To believe anything else contrary to this would mean we are not Christians (Followers of Christ)!
- Once all groups (Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, and Old Testament Saints) became included in the body of Christ (the Church) then there was no longer a need for any further delay in the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer. With the exception of a couple of unique instances; the practice of laying on of hands by the Apostles for the specific purpose of praying that the recipient would receive the Holy Spirit became unnecessary as the church progressed forward.

2. Simon's perversion of the truth (Acts 8:18-19)

- Apparently Simon must have seen some outward or external manifestation of the Spirit in those whom the Apostles prayed over which caused him to want the same power to impart the Spirit to others.
 - 1) Perhaps there was some sort of outward manifestation of speaking in tongues like what occurred at Pentecost.....we don't really know for sure. Such happens in other instances (Acts 2:4, 10:45-46, 19:6) so many commentators feel that is what occurred here.
 - 2) Whatever it was; Simon wanted to purchase this power that the Apostles had. This action of buying or selling of religious things (i.e. ecclesiastical offices) for favors became known as "simony".
- Sadly, he was treating the apostles as fellow practitioners of magic and sought to buy their secret magical powers as was customary within the world of magicians and occultic practice.

3. Peter's response shows that nothing God has is for sale (Acts 8:20)

- In fact Peter is _____ at the request and says; "may your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!"
 - 1) The actions of Simon (though different circumstances) show a similar attempt at personal gain in much the same manner as Judas Iscariot.
 - 2) Note the use of words that don't apply to a believer; "may your silver **perish** *with you*", "*you thought you could obtain* the gift of God with money". One is a condemning remark and the other shows no assurance and no hope for Simon.

- John MacArthur makes this claim; “Simon’s view of the Spirit as a commodity to be bought and added to his repertoire was utterly and blasphemously wrong, and betrayed his lost condition” (John MacArthur – Commentary on Acts page 246)
- Questions/Comment:

A Wrong View of Sin (Acts 8:21-24)

1. It appears that Peter establishes where Simon’s heart truly was by declaring; “you have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God” (Acts 8:21)
 - This seems to imply that Simon was not a _____ for he lacked a contrite/repentant heart right from the start.
 - The question comes into play with what will Simon do from here as Peter will call him to repent of this wickedness.
2. The call to repentance (Acts 8:22-23)
 - Peter is calling him (Simon) to have a proper view of sin....what precisely does he want Simon to admit or see?
 - Had Simon repented; what would the results have been?
 - What else did Peter note about Simon’s spiritual condition? (Acts 8:23, see also Deuteronomy 29:18-20, Hebrews 12:15, Proverbs 5:22)
 - Simon was wrapped up in false doctrine, error, and sin which had him in bondage. The only way to be released from that was to truly repent and accept God’s grace.

3. Simon's actions displayed that he was shaken but not persuaded by Peter's words. (Acts 2:24)
 - It appears that he only wanted to escape the immediate/temporary consequences of his sin.....thus he appears only to express sorrow and took no action of turning from it.
 - Listen to what Paul writes in II Corinthians 7:9-10; "I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death"

Concluding Remarks:

1. Perhaps Simon's actions both now and in the future reveal someone whose personal sorrow was void of the type of sorrow required by God that leads to salvation which would reveal his faith to be false, without hope and a faith that does not save.
2. Comments/questions: