

- ***READ Acts 8:9-13*** At least in my estimation, one of the greatest benefits of the book of the Acts of the Apostles is the encouragement and teaching that we get from reading the various conversion stories. Whether it be the mass conversions of Acts 2 and beyond, the converting of entire households such as that of Lydia, the Philippian jailor, or Cornelius, or the individual conversions of men such as Saul, Simon, the Eunuch, and others...there is just so much encouragement that can be gained as we read of the Gospel working upon the hearts of all of these people.
- And yet, we must not kid ourselves in thinking that conversion is always a squeaky clean process. Sure, the conversion of the 3,000 and beyond in **Acts 2** reads like a fairy tale scenario, but if we look at the conversion of Saul we find a man who had done some awful things and had to face a dark past in coming into the service of Christ Jesus. He even had brethren who were not all that sure about accepting him into their presence because of what he had done. Conversion brought Saul hope and purpose, but it also brought about issues he had to face.
- The exact same thing could be true of the man Simon that we just read about just a few moments ago. As the Gospel is spreading throughout the known world of this time, we find Philip here in **Acts 8** going down to the city of Samaria where he was preaching the Gospel message to those who would listen. There were great crowds that gathered around to hear Philip's message and to see the signs that he was performing. One such man who was in these crowds was Simon, and the story of his conversion is certainly one that is fascinating, and it is also one that gives us some good lessons that we can consider and learn from. Let's begin by looking at the story of Simon and his turning from being a magician to being a disciple, and then we will consider those valuable lessons from his story.

I. Simon's Story

A. He was a former magician. (**Acts 8:9-11**)

1. Luke records that Simon apparently made his living at one time in his life as a man who practiced magic. Now, our understanding of magic that is performed today normally centers around the slight of hand, trickery, and illusion. This might have been what Simon practiced, but it is also a possibility that Simon was one who practiced what would've been more akin to sorcery that was powered by the works of Satan.
2. We have to remember that this was taking place during the days when the supernatural was very much active within the natural world. Demons, spirits, and miracles were present during their day, and it could be that Simon practiced a type of dark magic. This seems to at least be a possibility considering how his magic arts caused some to go so far as to proclaim him as being "*The Great Power of God.*" I believe there is a possibility that Simon was practicing something more than just some crafty card tricks.

B. He loved getting attention. (**Acts 8:9-11**)

1. Luke also gives effort to mention in various ways that Simon was a pretty well known magician and that he seems to have thoroughly enjoyed the attention that he gained from the magic he was performing. We'll notice first that he was making claims to be someone who was great. (**Acts 8:9**) Additionally, he had people of all ages buying into his act, and many people gave him great attention for what he was doing.
2. This isn't something peculiar just to what Simon was doing. The reality is that nearly all performers of whatever kind they might be have some level of appreciation for the attention they receive for what they are doing. Some obviously enjoy it more than others. Simon seems to have been one of those people, but I do find it interesting that Luke seems to indicate that he no longer practiced magic by the time Philip came around. Regardless, it is important to note Simon's enjoyment of attention because it comes into play in his story as we continue to break down the information given to us in this text.

C. He was baptized by Philip. (Acts 8:12,13)

1. It is good to remember that one of the reasons Philip even found himself in Samaria was because of the persecution that had arisen against the Christians who were in Jerusalem. Saul's efforts in ravaging the church had caused for disciples to leave Jerusalem and go far and wide while also taking the Gospel with them. These people of Samaria were the beneficiaries of the trouble that was being experienced by those who were in Jerusalem. I point this out simply to show that God can use even the most difficult of circumstances to accomplish His will.
2. Nonetheless, as Philip arrives in Samaria, he begins to do just as the disciples did in that day... he went on preaching and sharing the message of the Gospel with the lost. Simon was a part of those who heard the good news about the kingdom of God, believed, and was baptized. The text goes on to indicate that Simon became a follower of Philip in his work upon his conversion to Christianity. (Acts 8:13)

D. He is reprimanded for trying to buy the power of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14-24)

1. We next see in the narrative that the Apostles, who were still in Jerusalem, became aware of the conversions that were taking place in Samaria. Peter and John were sent to go north to Samaria where they would be able to lay hands on those who had been converted so that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Luke records that people were becoming disciples, but that didn't automatically mean that they were receiving the Holy Spirit in a miraculous nature. This would've been why the Apostles Peter and John were needing to be present in Samaria.
2. Upon their arriving and laying hands on these new believers, we find Simon being witness to these things, and this prompts him to offer the Apostles money so that he might have the ability lay his hands on others so that they might be able to receive the Holy Spirit. The request in and of itself might not seem all that bad, but there are a couple issues that we can see and infer from the text based upon Simon's history and the response of Peter.
 - a) First, we need to keep in mind Simon's past and how he himself had at one time claimed to be something great. Like most performers, it isn't out of the question to think that Simon loved the attention and maybe even thought about using the Holy Spirit to get some of that attention back for himself.
 - b) Additionally, Peter takes great issue with Simon thinking that the Holy Spirit could be bought with money. Peter takes Simon's offering of money and tells him that this was a sign that his heart wasn't in the right condition before God. His advice was that Simon needed to pray to God for repentance since he found himself caught up in this sin. (Acts 8:18-23)
3. Thankfully, Simon seems to be contrite and even asks Peter and John that they might pray for him that he might be forgiven of his mistakes. This story about Simon and his conversion seems to be quite different from many of the other conversions we find in the Book of Acts, but there are some important lessons that we can learn from what we have seen thus far.

II. What We Can Learn

A. Miracles weren't given to simply impress men.

1. Let's notice that Simon had previously been a person that had himself performed impressive deeds that had gained attention from the youngest to the oldest of people. It seems pretty logical to me that he would've been naturally drawn to someone who did something similar in Philip and his mighty deeds of healing people of unclean spirits and healing those who were paralyzed and lame.
2. Fast forward to when the Apostles come down so that they might lay hands on people to receive the Spirit and we have what I would call a perfect storm of temptation for Simon. He had lived for so long as a person who would do anything to gain the admiration of men, and here was an opportunity for Him to gain that very power back.

3. However, he failed to realize that the power of the Holy Spirit wasn't given to men so that they might gain a following and impress others. It wasn't about being well known and being able to show-out. The power of the Holy Spirit was all about establishing faith in God and giving evidence that God was with those who carried the Gospel.
4. This can easily be seen as being the purpose of the miraculous deeds of those sent by God when we look at Jesus's ministry. I think back to **John 6** and the time when Jesus rebuked the multitudes because they only followed Him in order to gain from the miracles that He was performing. I also think about how Jesus wasn't willing to perform miracles in His hometown because the people were so hardhearted and unwilling to believe even if a miracle was performed. (**Matthew 13:58**) If miracles were just about impressing men, then there would be no reason to not perform a miracle at anytime, but Peter shows us through his rebuke of Simon that miracles were about so much more. They were given to show proof of God being with the messenger, and they were not given simply as a popularity booster.

B. Conversion doesn't eliminate previous temptations.

1. As I just mentioned, this story of Simon, the Apostles, and the giving of the Holy Spirit was a perfect storm for Simon to slide back into his old habits, and slide back seems to be exactly what he did. That tells me that just because someone has repented of their sins and turned to God in new life doesn't mean that those old temptations are going to magically disappear.
2. We have to remember that those things that tempt us vary from person to person and they depend on those things that we desire. (**James 1:14,15**) Just because we are baptized and now are striving to live for God doesn't mean that those desires are going to evaporate overnight. This is especially true if we have lived for a long time giving into those things that we desire that are against God. Simon had long lived as someone who loved the attention of men and claimed to be someone great, and it seems that Satan took advantage of this situation and did his absolute best to try to get Simon to fall back into sin.
3. This should stand as a strong warning for us that we keep our head on a swivel and realize that sinful desires of weak flesh and temptations are always going to be present within our lives. We should hope that we are able to build up a resistance against those things that have caused us issues in the past, but that doesn't mean that we can completely let up and not stay on the alert against those temptations showing up in our lives again. Being a Christian isn't about no longer being tempted, but it is about being able to withstand the temptations because we now live in view of the fact that we have been bought with a price. (**I Corinthians 6:20; 7:23**) Therefore we are willing to resist the temptations in order to glorify God in our bodies, minds, and lives.

C. Saved believers can sin and be in need of repentance.

1. Most of us are probably well aware of the teachings of Calvinism and how one of its foundational teachings states that those who have been chosen by God to be saved can no longer sin and fall from grace. When I think about that teaching and this story of Simon, I have a very difficult time figuring out how that teaching of Calvinism can be true and be reconciled with what we see in this section of Luke's record of the Acts of the Apostles.
2. It seems very clear to me that Simon had become a believer. *"Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip."* (**Acts 8:13**) If this isn't stating that Simon was a Christian, then I don't know what else could be said to show such a thing as being true. Put this together with Peter's rebuke of Simon, and it seems very clear to me that Simon was a Christian who had sinned in such a way that he needed to repent so that he wouldn't suffer the consequences of standing before God in sin. (**Acts 8:22,23**)

3. If this is the case, then we must conclude that if a Christian such as Simon was able to sin and be in need of repentance then we must be on guard against temptations that would lead to sin. In reality, we must conclude that if temptations don't disappear upon conversion to Jesus Christ as a disciple then there is always a possibility that we might sin and once again separate ourselves from God through our sinful actions or thoughts.
4. Honestly, we could not have this story of Simon and still realize this as being true. All throughout the New Testament Epistles we find warnings addressed to disciples that they are to stand strong against temptations and avoid sinning against God. I think specifically about the Letter written to the Hebrews and the admonitions that they not drift away from where they currently were in their faiths. (**Hebrews 2:1**) I also think about what is written in **Hebrews 3:12-19** and how these disciples were warned about falling away from the living God and not being able to enter the promised rest because of their unbelief. I am convinced that the Bible is clear on the Christian's ability to forsake their faith and sin against God so as to be lost again, and the story of Simon only solidifies this as being accurate.

Past this section of Scripture there isn't anything else divinely written about Simon. We don't know what ended up being his fate in regards to his faith, but it ought to be our hope that he learned how to resist his desires for fame and attention and instead direct his efforts towards living for God's glory and praise. May we ourselves remember as we go throughout this week that all glory and honor is only deserved by our great God and that we must stand ready to resist the temptations and sin that Satan puts in our way so that we might be the holy and righteous people that Jesus died for us to be. We were truly bought with a great price and for that reason we should give great effort to live up to the holy standard that has been put before us. Simon learned valuable lessons the hard way, but may we be willing to learn from his mistakes without having to make them ourselves.