

Text: Ac 8.18-24

Proposition: You will discover real Christianity in humble repentance from self and the world, turning instead to submissive dependence on God.

Last week we were talking about *Astonishing Appearances*, the spread of the gospel into Samaria.

- Astonishing because of the long-standing division between Jews and Samaritans
- Astonishing because of the signs and wonders Philip performed
- Astonishing because a well-known Samaritan magician was himself converted and baptized (apparently)

And Simon the magician himself was astonished at the mighty works, making it the focus of his new found religion.

Our theme was that Christian faith is *word-based*, not *sensation* based.

What converted the Samaritans was not the signs themselves, but the *word* Philip preached.

This week I want to continue with this idea of sensation and the desire for sensation. I've given our message this title:

Continuing In Sensation

We will focus on Simon in this message. There is another major theme in this passage, but I plan to come back to it next week.

The continuing story of Simon raises two major questions:

1. Was Simon a Christian or not?
2. Whatever Simon was, what does this passage teach us for our spiritual lives today?

I suppose that second question is the most important one.

When we think of this passage, it does seem a little strange that Luke included it, especially without clearly resolving the first question.

However, I think the passage has important truths to teach us and to challenge any observers who are fumbling around with Christianity but not finding any real spiritual life for their souls.

After all, Christianity ought to make us new. It could have made Simon new, but I am afraid it didn't. Not because it couldn't, because he wouldn't.

If you think about that statement, you will see that I am giving away my conclusions about Simon. Let's read our passage.

Read Ac 8.14-24, text 18-24

Proposition: You will discover real Christianity in humble repentance from self and the world, turning instead to submissive dependence on God.

I. Pursuing sensational desires (18-19)

A. Observing the laying on of hands (14-17)

I plan to preach on these verses next week, so only a brief summary today.

1. Apostles in Jerusalem send Peter and John to ratify Philip's work (we'll explain this more next week) (14)
2. Peter and John find the new believers in the unusual position of professing faith but not having received the Holy Spirit (15-16)
3. As Peter and John lay hands on the believers, they receive the Spirit (17)
 - a. On this point, again, more next week, but...
 - b. Something visible/tangible occurred
 - c. The Biblical process since the New Testament (and mostly during the NT) is belief in Christ and immediate reception of the Spirit *without outward manifestation*
 - d. The *without outward manifestation* is a critical point – the Spirit is received by faith just as is Jesus
 - e. However, given the account here, something was visible, either speaking in tongues or some similar manifestation

B. Simon's "post-conversion" behaviour (13, 18)

1. Simon continued on with Philip (stuck close to him) (13)
 - a. "As he observed" – Present tense participle, linear action, "beholding"
 - b. Behold = "being a spectator, looking at" – taking it all in

- c. Signs and miracles: we remarked last week at Simon's fascination with the sensational
 - d. His stock in trade had been sensations, he was interested in sensations (in the past at least, especially for his own advantage)
2. Simon saw the "laying on of hands" of Peter and John (18)
- a. Aorist tense verb, views the whole event as a complete action
 - b. There is no indication that Simon himself had as yet receive the Spirit, just that he saw what had happened to others
 - c. As we noted, somehow the reception of the Spirit was perceivable by outside observers – the specific manifestation is unimportant
 - d. The significant thing is this: the manifestations attracted Simon's attention
- C. The offer to buy the authority (18b-19)
1. Simon offered money (18b)
- a. As a practitioner of magic, his stock-in-trade had been his "magic" devices
 - b. Amongst such, it was not unusual to make "magic secrets" available to others for a price
2. Simon's desire: "this authority" (19)
- a. "The expression 'this authority' points to a right, an assigned enablement."¹
 - b. Objective: to be able to use this authority to "give the Spirit" to whomever he chose – note "everyone"
 - c. What Simon was thinking (implied, not explained)
 - 1) It was the laying on of hands itself that was "the trick"
 - 2) The authority to do this was a commodity

¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 332–33.

- 3) He no doubt thought this could be *very valuable to him*: another magic trick to add to his repertoire

We have a term in our language that derives from this event: 'simony' – making religious office a commodity to be bought and sold. This specifically refers to the "livings" that were available to the English clergy in England in the Anglican parish church system.

What Simon was doing was far worse than that: he is viewing the Holy Spirit as an occult power.

II. Preaching entire submission (20-23)

A. Strong rebuke in the form of a curse (20)

1. The nature of Peter's rebuke

- a. Peter's "rebuke is severe."²
- b. "Literally, Be with thee for destruction."³
- c. Present optative case, only use in NT, expresses a future wish
- d. Essentially this is a curse: "A pox on you and your money" could be a paraphrase

2. The provocation of Peter's indignation

a. The Holy Spirit is not

- 1) For sale
- 2) Magic
- 3) A commodity

b. The Holy Spirit is to be received and served, not used and manipulated

"Simon completely misunderstood when he saw the Spirit as coming through the human gesture of the

² Bock, 333.

³ A. T Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Ac 8.20.

apostles' laying their hands on the Samaritans. He was viewing the whole matter through a magician's eyes. But Christianity has nothing to do with magic, and God's Spirit is not subject to a charlatan's manipulation—not in Simon's day or for any profit-making Christian charlatan of our own day."⁴

B. Stern evaluation of spiritual condition (21)

1. The relation of Simon to the gospel

- a. Lit. “not is to you a part nor a portion in the *λογος* (word)”
- b. Possessive dative, meaning Simon has no possession in this matter
- c. This matter = “the word”, perhaps an expression meaning to stand for the whole gospel, “You have no part in the gospel”

“**Neither part nor lot** is OT language for having no share in something (see Deut. 12:12; 14:27), and this seems to indicate that Simon has now disclosed the condition of his heart and that he did not truly belong to the people of God.”⁵

2. The condition of Simon's heart before God

- a. This is the reason for Peter's evaluation “for”
- b. Simon has a moral defect in his relation to God
- c. The passage seems to indicate that Simon had not responded to the gospel as preached, but to his own greed and opportunism: he sensed an opportunity

False professions of faith come for many reasons; individuals see some advantage to Christianity *to them* personally.

- They don't see their guilt before God

⁴ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 219–20.

⁵ *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2097.

- They don't see themselves as under the wrath of God
- They see Christianity as advantageous to their own life and situation for *whatever* reason

How terrible it is to present the gospel as an advantageous lifestyle, for example. Can men be right with God if they think that being a Christian gives them a good life now?

C. Gracious call for repentance (22)

1. The responsibility is placed on Simon: repent and pray
 - a. This is a gracious offer, in spite of the stern words of condemnation and evaluation
 - b. Though Simon had a low view of God and gospel, he could repent from his wickedness, *if he would*
2. The possibility of forgiveness
 - a. The expression is meant to communicate that forgiveness is possible
 - b. But it also suggests that forgiveness is dependent on something, it is the consequence of something

The big point to we must draw from this verse is that Peter, though indignant and rebuking is offering Simon an opportunity for repentance.

- Despite an almost blasphemous view of the Holy Spirit
- Despite the obvious continuing commitment to self-interest

This should encourage anyone who has heard the gospel message time and again, but never been converted. You can be converted, if the conditions are met...

But what are the conditions?

D. Spiritual perception of unrepentant heart (23)

1. “For” – again Peter is revealing a reason for what he says
2. The for points back to the possibility of forgiveness: “if possible that you might be forgiven, for I see why you might not be forgiven”
3. Why? For you are in the gall of bitterness
 - a. “Gall of bitterness” expresses the attitudes of Simon’s heart
 - b. “Bondage of iniquity” expresses the preoccupation of Simon’s life

Simon is like the rich young ruler: the rich young ruler was in bondage to his possessions. Simon is in bondage to his lusts for power and money.

The rich young ruler went away sorrowfully; I don’t think Simon did.

III. Proving the state of the spirit (24)

“How verse 24 is read determines in the end whether one thinks Luke is portraying Simon as responsive.”⁶

A. The important words in the verse

1. “Pray ... yourselves” [I’m not going to bother]
2. “nothing of what you have said” [I’m betting your words aren’t true]

B. What Simon lacked

1. Submission to the gospel
2. Respect for the apostles
3. Belief in the actual Holy Spirit (he believed in the “magic”)
4. Any kind of a repentant heart

C. The episode closes without resolving the questions, but the warnings are sober

1. If you demean the Holy Spirit, you risk destruction

⁶ Bock, *Acts*, 334.

2. If you refuse to accept the message of the gospel, to some extent you *are* demeaning the Holy Spirit: you refuse to believe His word

Conclusion:

Proposition: You will discover real Christianity in humble repentance from self and the world, turning instead to submissive dependence on God.

Have you come to Christ in humble submission?

Do you know that you are a sinner who cannot save yourself?

Do you desire to know Christ as Saviour?

Repent and believe!